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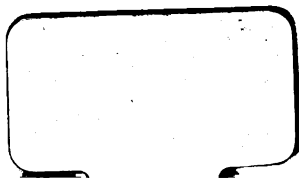
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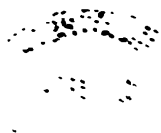
ONE of "US"

RANDOLPH



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ONE OF "U.S."

A Novel.

BY
EDMUND RANDOLPH,
(JR.)

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



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ONE OF "U S."



CHAPTER I.

I, JOHN LESSENDEN, am a guest at the Knowall and Littlemore Club.

I am not the man to under-estimate such a privilege; and though, so far, I have only encroached on their hospitality to the extent of a "sherry and bitters," and though my entertainer will, I feel sure, expect at least a dinner in return at my own little modest "house," I do not cavil at the order of things—as well quarrel with the



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inclined to resent it when I decline his offer of the "other half," it being as yet scarcely noonday.

How came Mr. Cooly here? How comes he everywhere? His father is a country curate, or something of the kind, and he has no connections or relations worth mentioning, but they make him up a hundred a year among them; he will tell you as much in the easiest way, and admit that it "comes in." What is his secret? Not his looks, for he allows, with his usual candour, that he is "the ugliest beggar in the 'service';" nor presumably his talents, for he scraped into it some time ago, last but one on the list, and now belongs to some confounded line regiment, whose name and number he can't tell you straight off without a calculation on his fingers. His laconic

explanation, when questioned as to his superhuman success, is "luck." And really I see no better; but it is trying to find a youth who was being very properly birched at the period of one's own first *début*, thus far up the ladder already. So, it is quite evident, feels Skipwith, my friend of the bitters—a man whose age you wouldn't quite ask, and much the reverse of Cooly. He will, I hope, describe himself in time. Just now, he is in a very critical state, which is normal with him, for he seldom exactly approves of what anybody else says or does. "It's the biggest thing," he is observing, airily, "since the 'Eglintoun,' where my grandfather tilted." "Overdone," mutters Mr. Cooly, abstractedly, gulping his champagne. Mr. Skipwith flushes. The shadow of a doubt on the

authenticity of his grandfather is, for reasons best known to himself, a grave matter.

Ignoring Mr. Cooly as far as possible, "Of course," he goes on, "it is important in every way that I should be there. 'Haversham Palace' is a place quite unique in itself; and Mrs. Smijthe's attempt at a revival of its old glories is extremely creditable, and deserves encouragement."

It is foggy, the gas is alight, and Mr. C.'s eyeglass presents a flat, inexpressive circle of fire. There may be a smile beneath; it is difficult to say. His ugliness has this speciality—that no contortion of feature makes the slightest difference in his expression.

"You can't imagine what the rsuh will be," continues the speaker, explaining matters as if we had just

landed from Nova Zembla. "I am not sure, for all that, that I couldn't get you a ticket for the fancy ball on Friday week."

"Thursday," corrects the other. Skipwith affects not to hear.

"Why, Cooly," I interrupt, "are you one of us?"

"H'm! Promised to take Jones and Robinson; s'pose I shall have to be there."

"Well, thank you very much, Skippy," I answer; "but I happen to have my invitation for the week in my pocket. Never mind; come and dine with me at the 'Hoy Polloy' all the same."

But this is too much for him; he has vanished. The victor utters a short but expressive word, and finishes his glass.

"Not such a bad fellow," I say,

apologetically, "when you know him. Read his last?"

"Never read a book, except to see what sort of a fool the author is; unnecessary here. You'd better let me put you up for the week," he goes on, pulling at a new cigar; "and if you've any friends you know—regiment's at Highbury, close by—more cosy."

"Hospitality seems to be infectious in the neighbourhood," I remark. "Many thanks, no."

"Well, come and have some breakfast; it's nearly one."

Is this everyday life with our friend, I wonder. "What would papa say?" I have to decline this also.

"Well, ta-ta, then, old man," he says; and we separate.

As a matter of fact, an invitation for the "Haversham week" is not to be

sneezed at ; and this year the thing is to be done on an enormous scale. The Indigo Smijthes are people of fabulous wealth and unbounded hospitality, who have been going up in the scale ever since she—a poor and pretty nobody of seventeen—married the old man ten years back. As I remember her, not so long ago, a clever little maiden in pinafores, the development of all this has been most interesting ; the more so, as I know it is all her doing, and not his. Her first thought, however, is always of her old friends ; and, after them, of who she can catch in the way of talent, celebrity, or rank, and honestly, I believe, in the order I have placed them.

I have always had a respect for that intelligent and well-informed individual, "the casual observer." One can

scarcely open a paper without seeing his opinions quoted, or his views discussed. "To the casual observer, it appears." "The casual observer would remark." To play this unobtrusive and rather superior part at the Haversham gathering ought to be not a little amusing—like looking at a play, on Mr. Cooly's principles of seeing what sort of fools the actors are. I would try and achieve this enviable position; and thus it comes that the next afternoon, a like dark winter day, I ensconce myself in the corner of a dimly-lighted carriage in one of the Northern railway stations. It is fearfully cold. The engine is jibbing in an undecided way, unable to get its wheels to bite the frozen rails, when, as we begin to slide out of the station, two people stagger into the carriage, breathless and panting,

amidst a chaos of rugs, sticks, umbrellas, and dressing-bags. These individuals presently separate from the mass, and resolve themselves into man and woman. As the latter loosens some of her wraps, I note that she is extremely well-dressed, though perhaps a little behind the fashion—say six weeks or so.

"How lucky!" she exclaims to her companion. "I was sure we'd missed it. 'My lord' would have been put about."

"Yes," he drawls, languidly; "yes, Chucky, she couldn't do very well without you. I suppose it will be the old game." They both laugh. "You must see a thing or two." The lady's mouth puckers, expressive of unutterable secrets.

"It's bigger than ever this time," she rejoins, with some gusto, opening her

bag, upon which, as the cover falls off, glistens a monogram and a coronet. The man utters an expressive "Ah," takes out a tortoiseshell cigar-case, and lights up, with an off remark to me, that "as the lady doesn't mind," he concludes I don't. I bow, but resolve that I must cut him out.

"Did you get *Punch*?" she asks.

"No," he replies; "hadn't time."

Now is mine, at any rate. "Allow me," I interpose, drawing the paper from my pocket and handing it to her. I am rewarded with the prettiest possible little gesture of thanks. She takes it, trifles with it for a few minutes, and lisps, "How abthurd!" I watch her, and come to the conclusion she would rather talk. We easily drift into conversation. She may perhaps be seven and twenty, and must have

made good use of her time, for she knows everything and everybody.

What a charming place was "Schlangenbad," where they spent three weeks last summer; and those dear beech woods, in the early morning; and that string band of ugly men, and divinely beautiful music; and the Grand Duke (Schlosserboschenstein, you know), he was so kind, and insisted on giving up his own sitting-room, when he found they were in want of another; and Lord Jim Harkaway, so good-looking and so affable—the scoundrel! "Everybody called him 'Jim,' it so exactly fitted him; and, indeed, he wouldn't answer to any other name. And the Pinkertons—of course I knew them, and had been to their ball. No? Ah, that was a pity! Lady Jim's dress was *écru* satin; the skirt looped up

with diamond wheat-ears, and the body——"

Here the gentleman, who has been shooting his linen, tossing his nose in the air, and exhibiting other unequivocal but useless signs of disapproval, apparently relents, and breaks in—

"Recollect Hetherington's hop last year, Chucky? By George! she came out in style there."

"Good shooting at Hetherington, I saw by the papers," I observe, graciously.

"Ya—as! so, so; but hunting? I believe you—prime!"

He is certainly very peculiar. Who can he be? One of the new peers, perhaps.

"Do you happen to know Haversham? I am on my way there, and thought——"

The lady positively jumps, and looks

round at her friend ; then titters, and begins to fumble with the fastenings of her bag. He pulls up his collar, and slouches his hat over his eyes, muttering something about a cursed draught, and settles himself to sleep. The lady lets down her veil, and leans back, evidently with the same intention. I try to renew the conversation, in vain. What have I said ? What have I done ? The lamp, which has been for some time in a galloping consumption, further obscures matters by expiring altogether.

And I sit for the next quarter of an hour in silence and darkness, thinking how unaccountable some things are in this world. I may be morbid, but I fancy I hear whisperings and subdued laughter from the opposite side. When, in due time, my destination is reached,

I jump out and wish her good-night, mumbling something about "pleasure—meet again." She replies, "Thanks—daresay," and titters afresh. I am rather annoyed; I see nothing at all to laugh at.

The platform to which I descend is wet and sloppy; a drizzling rain is falling. I hope to goodness they have sent the brougham, and not the wagonette, and I look round, expecting two or three men to rush forward and seize my luggage. It is a small roadside station, but sparsely lighted. A dozen muffled figures jostle each other in the darkness, but nothing in the shape of a cockade comes to gladden my eyes. Presently an underfed, overgrown boy loafs up, and catching hold of my bag with great show of animation, asks if I "be going to the 'Pink

in very cold water comes with startling effect, but I bear on.

In twenty minutes we see another light in front of us, and soon get into a wide, straggling street of tumble-down houses, at the far end of which swings, projecting, a doleful lamb—or what I take to be one—of uncertain hue, with a mournful, creaky bleat, and below it stands—surely?—a coach.

"Is that the Highbury mail?" I snap at the lăd.

He "s'poses so, as there ain't no other."

"Imp of Satan!" I fling in his teeth, "couldn't you have told me that before?" and dash forward to catch it.

Haversham lies on the road to Highbury, but is seven miles away. I am just in the nick of time; but as I grasp the handle of the door, a yell

greet me, and a number of red, substantial fists are thrust through the window and brandished in my face. It is crowded with market women—filled in, and flowing over. They are sitting on each other's knees, standing, jammed in anyhow.

"Turn 'im out, turn 'im out!" they scream; but I never get nearer than the step. One thing is flat—I won't go outside, on a night like this. I wrench the door open, and for five minutes we argue. I pile up the agony.

I am consumptive (here I cough pitifully); two lungs are gone, and the third nearly so; rheumatism is no word for what I suffer in the joints. My mother died at fifteen, and my father at twenty-two, both from riding outside a coach. I have walked thirty-three

miles, and my great-grandfather, at Highbury, is not expected to see to-morrow's light. Finally, I appeal to them as "ladies." This goes to their hearts. Ungraciously, I am allowed to get in *if I can*. When at last I do so, the door will not close upon us, and I have to stand, holding the strap in my hand, so we jolt off.

A sullen silence succeeds the babble of tongues, until a sour-faced woman who is munching an apple in the corner observes, as she hurls the core viciously past me out of the window, that she "s'poses 'e were brought up among gells, and likes 'em," with a withering glance at me. A giggle goes round. A rosy-faced young fish-wife chimes in, "It's lucky for 'im if 'e do," for she "'spects 'e's enough of 'em now." Heaven help me! it is

too true. Like an historic ruffian, I am becoming rapidly oblivious of age and sex. I only know that we are eight human beings, packed in the space of four. The fire still smoulders. An immense woman with herculean shoulders and a masculine voice, declares that nothing would give her more pleasure than to see another man try and get in. It has always been her belief, that one woman is equal to two men. A murmur of assent from the party, and "Aye, indeed, sure." She only wishes that one—or, for that matter, two—would try it on, and she'd soon prove it. She then proceeds to tell a series of domestic anecdotes about her "Joe," the gist of which is that she "don't stand no nonsense;" and ending with, she "ketched 'im over the ear, and just showed 'im, ah!"

and other indignities, which, for the honour of my sex, I forbear to reveal.

Looking at this terrible woman, and listening to her voice, the conviction that she speaks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, comes strong upon me, and I think of the French Revolution with a shiver. Her *vis-à-vis* remarks casually, she "never knowed a gentleman who would not go outside to oblige a lady" (very strong emphasis on the two words). As for herself, she'd "go outside like a knife, if she 'adn't a bad leg, and a 'ole in 'er stocking.". She didn't "suppose 'e"—jerking her hand in my direction—" 'ad no bad legs, nor 'oles in 'is stocking, neither ;" and she scowls across at me.

The conversation is not one in which I can easily join ; they don't give me

the chance, for they only talk at me. I would give worlds to be able to pull up my trouser, and show a dozen holes. Alas! the thing is impossible; her surmise is correct.

"'Tain't as if there weren't a lady outside on the box at this moment, poor dear!" she continues, "and a gentleman, and one parasol atween two of 'em"—a groan of deep commiseration—"as is not much to keep 'em warm, and must sit intimate like to do it at all in this weather; and the gentleman just as good as this 'un, and better too, as knowed 'is place!"

The golden hours flit by, the only fresh incident being that one of the young ladies is seized with qualms, which serve to divert attention from myself, and now I can feel thankful even for so small a mercy as this. The invalid is plied

with raw brandy, gingerbread, peppermint, cold bottled tea, and sweets, which have precisely the effect I anticipated. Then comes the climax, and *I* am asked for my pocket-handkerchief; "these good ladies doesn't use 'em." I fling the sop to Cerberus in desperation. At length the coach crosses the first block of a double stone bridge spanning the arms of a rapid river, and stops midway before an Elizabethan lodge, and beautiful wrought gates of iron with gilded scroll work. This is Haversham.

CHAPTER II.

A LONG aisle of giant beeches and red-berried hollies stretches in front; on either side of which, so that the avenue forms an isthmus, runs the river—a curious effect.

The night has cleared, but the fleecy clouds drive rapidly across the inky expanse of the heavens. The floods are out on the lowlands, and the waters are lit up like burnished silver; their sound fills my ears, as they rush by and toss and chafe themselves against the narrow arches of the bridge. The people at the lodge are loud in their condolences; but I cut them

short, and, bidding them send on my things, stroll slowly towards the palace. Apparently, some friends of the lodge-keeper's also get out, for I see some one descend, and hear voices and laughter as I leave them, and the coach rolls away into the night. The sonorous bell of the stable clock-tower booms seven through the naked branches of the encircling beeches, as I emerge from the shades of the drive into the open space in front of the building.

It is a vast pile, originally a Tudor edifice,—it has been much added to, at many dates. The old part stands almost entire, and the dining-hall occupies the whole of one side of it. Lights are glancing to and fro in the huge square mullioned windows, and through the stained glass of the tower

which forms the bay at one end ; they fall on the rime-whitened ground in streams of many-coloured light. The gate-bell clangs to my touch, and I am shown into a small entrance hall, panelled in black oak, and hung with family portraits, chiefly by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

It is incredible the number of houses in which Sir Joshua comes to the front in the same way. I boast an ancestor painted by Raphael myself, which perhaps should teach me consideration for others ; but that is in the Vatican, whereas these Sir Joshua's are always to hand ; and there is usually some family anecdote tacked on, as—

“ One morning, when he (Sir J——) was painting my great grandmother's portrait, which you see there, he flung down his brush, declaring that unless

her head-dress was lowered a yard and a quarter, it would be impossible to get the face on to the canvas at all. It was done, but the shock was so severe that it brought on brain fever, and though she ultimately recovered, she never could bear the sight of the picture, and it was hung for fifty-seven years with its face to the wall, until," etc. ; or, "Observe the likeness of my great uncle, one of the wildest bloods of his day, sir ! It was impossible to get the young dog to sit quiet, until Sir Joshua, losing all patience, declared, placing his thumb on the painting, that if his sitter stirred another inch, he would smear the whole thing out. (Observe, sir, the print of it beneath the left eye.) The effect of this appeal was such, that my great uncle remained for hours

like a statue; and ever after through life, when he sat down, he fell naturally into that position and grew perfectly rigid."

Sir Joshua must have worked hard in his day, and must have been a "smart" man into the bargain, to pick out so many of those very people whose descendants would require ancestors as time went on. I know very well that Mrs. Indigo never had an ancestor (let alone her immediate father and mother, and there is considerable uncertainty about them), and never could have afforded one, until she married.

But to return to the hall. The floor is of polished oak of the most dangerous description. I once saw a distinguished ecclesiastic stagger over it in an extraordinary manner, and finally cross it by holding on to the wall.

He had been down, I found out. True, it was before dinner, but it looked very bad.

The porter shows me in, takes my coat and stick, and is very regretful on the subject of the carriage, when the maroon velvet curtains of an archway opposite divide, and an elderly gentleman of aristocratic, but saddened aspect, comes blandly forward, with a few kind and well-chosen words of welcome. I am ready for him. A sovereign, which has lain in wait in my waistcoat pocket, is, by a not difficult sleight of hand, conveyed into his palm. He bows; it is enough—at least, so *I* think. Will nothing lift that sadness from his brow? He makes no further remark, but waits.

"Will you be good enough to show me up?" I ask, at last.

"I have rung for the footman; he will conduct you in a minute," he replies. One to him. Perhaps I ought to apologize. Delicate matter an apology, at the best of times. I won't risk it.

In his own good time, the footman comes; but even he is not able to see me through, and I am handed over to a fourth gentleman—a cross, as far as I can make out, between a cavalry colonel and a beadle—who finally ushers me into a large room full of people.

One word of retrospect. Mrs. Indigo Smijthe had visions, in early days, of rising to fame and fortune as an authoress. She began, at the comparatively early age of thirteen, to instruct the world with little Christmas stories; but finding, as she developed, that her good looks were far more

appreciated than her good books, she gave them to the world instead—and, as it proved, to some purpose.

After her marriage, the idea of forming a literary salon absorbed all her efforts for a time; but the *litterati* disappointed her. She found them bad talkers, and "nearly all ugly," as she naïvely put it. They had enormous appetites, and when they sat down to dinner, "took it quite too much *au grand sérieux*," and for a couple of hours scarcely looked up from their plates. They were excellent listeners, it is true; and a good thing said at table frequently underwent the process of resurrection in the society papers of the following week. But they were an absurd, unsocial race, shutting themselves up in their rooms on fine sunny days, and only appeared at meal times,

with white, haggard faces, and hair not well combed. Huge budgets of letters and printed matter deluged the house ; prospectuses littered the smoking-room ; vast quantities of first, second, and third numbers of strange papers and periodicals, never before or since heard of (they seldom went beyond the third number), lay gathered together, wherever space could be made for them.

It was a terrible state of things. The horses ate their heads off in the stables ; the guns rusted in their cases ; and the beginning of the end was, that the village postman, who had carried the bags for forty-two years, walking daily into Highbury and back, went at the knees, in consequence of the undue pressure brought so suddenly to bear upon them, and had to be pensioned off and superseded. Mrs. Indigo then

began to cast about her, being of a human disposition. On starting, she had found it necessary to sow the house with ink-bottles. In every corner large enough to allow of an inspiration, stood an inkstand and pen, wherewith to give it instant immortality. The harvest was now beginning to sprout. There were ink-stains on the carpets, ink-stains on the floors, ink on the ceilings (this last in a room inhabited by a comic poet for three weeks), ink everywhere. Quills were stuck behind the mirrors; steel penholders set one rolling on the staircase, and innumerable nibs crushed underfoot as one passed along. When any outer door opened for a minute, and let in the gentle north-easter, a dozen white-winged messengers would flutter about one's head.

For curiosity, I have seized and de-

tained some of these little waifs. Here is one—

"To JULIUS CÆSAR SMITH, ESQ.

"To boots patched and heeled.

Trousers, do., do., 1s. 7d.

Wh. sur shld. be gladly plesed if wd.
setle as i hev hevy act. to meet nex
weke, if so am truly yrs.,

"JOS. JENKS.

"P. S.—The others is gone with fare
ware and tare, and i can't do nothink."

Comment would be extravagant,
though a person of inquiring mind
might wonder how the two items came
on to one sheet. I may observe,
Smith took a big house in Curzon
Street last year, and duchesses fondle
him (metaphorically). This document
bears the marks of age.

Another—

"Oh! had I wings,
The kind of things
To-morrow brings
With sorrowings
And fears.

"Soft shades of green,
To cloud mine e'en,
Their glittering sheen,
My friends have seen
With tears.

"But lady thou,
Now vow, or how
Shall bow thy pow-
Er. . . ."

This fragment is very valuable. It is entitled, "To a Lady, on seeing her let down her Back Hair," and bears the now well-known initials H. M. R. When Horace Milton Robinson "started," simplicity was still the fashion. But times are indeed changed, and he has long since learned the value of the incomprehensible. His

last five works, as all the world knows, have been simply unintelligible, and have raised him to the highest pinnacle of wealth and fame. His earlier works are out of print, and he seldom refers to them.

But to return. When Mrs. Indigo grew tired of having her fenders used as scrapers, her walls decorated with the scratchings of innumerable matches, her carpets worn into holes by the thick-soled *literati*; and when the perfume of burning foolscap (the blue smoke of which curled up day and night to heaven) palled upon her—for these good people mostly flung their rejected contributions on the fire-back, with inconceivable wisdom, which can only be explained by the fact that there were a number of them together, and that each one encouraged

his friends, and consequently felt bound in honour to do likewise;—when all this happened, I say, Mrs. Indigo gave up her blue tendencies, drew up a penal code in the shape of a visiting list, and instituted an Order—the "Order of US." Something of a garter flavour hangs about it; and though the names, indeed, may be unwritten, to be "One of US" is to boast favour that can go no higher.

The room is crowded, but conversation flags, and, at the stentorian announcement of my name, ceases for a moment altogether. People look up with a sort of "Who the deuce is this new-comer?" expression; and, as if the answer occurred to all simultaneously, "Oh, nobody," at once go back to their talk or work. One of a group of three standing over the fire, looks

across, and makes some remark, at which the two others laugh. Men have perished for less ! Any ideas of bloodshed, however, are dispelled by our charming hostess, who comes forward. She is dressed in what may be fairly called a shooting-coat, and skirt of the same material—vulgarly, a suit of dittos, and there is a grace about it that one hardly associates with the term. After a pleasant greeting, she is off again, leaving me to my own devices, with an injunction to take stock of the company, from which, I conclude, that she is as proud of her collection as collectors generally are.

About are many familiar faces. Yonder is a chattering, undulating knot of "professional beauties"—the profession, I opine, like others that pay, is beginning to be overcrowded ; and there

—the photographs prevent any mistake on that point—is the new American millionairess, Miss Vibart, a superb creature, whose figure presents a wonderful combination of almost incredible curves. Her face is no less remarkable, and appears quite faultless; as is her complexion, which may last her a couple of years, if she is content to live on slops, spend half her days in sleep, never to dance more than once or twice, and to avoid cucumber as a pestilence—none of which, it is to be supposed, she will, to judge by what one has heard.

Here is Spavington, the great sporting captain—silent, inscrutable, immense. Here Kynaston, "Fidus Achates" of my youth, grown, as men do grow after reaching manhood, out of recognition—Quixotic, erratic, and in every way

unlike his fellows; if any man there merits a word of description, it is he.

By birth, and the Pink Book, he ranks as a "viscount." This, however, he steadily refuses to acknowledge, calling himself plain esquire, with the pertinacity of a retired tradesman. His grandfather, he urges, was made a peer merely to get him out of the way, and not for anything good or great, therefore he will have none of it. His "way," his good looks, and his money, have been fearfully irresistible with women; he has had them in scores at his feet. If he knows it, which I doubt, he shows not an atom of self-consciousness, and treats all with a kindly but somewhat distant courtesy, which is not very common nowadays. A man of whom everything was expected when he left college, where he carried all before

him, he must needs go through the Russo-Turkish war as a private. Early in the campaign he was reported killed, and it is said that fourteen spinsters, in London alone, put on something very like widow's weeds for him—reverting to their usual colours, when it was discovered that he had sufficient vitality left in him to go through the siege of Plevna. Since then, he has lived almost entirely abroad, and his name is seldom seen, unless it be in a subscription list. Old friends never come back quite the same, and though his face lightens as he sees me, we run no longer in the like grooves ; and something sadly, after a few minutes' talk, I turn away, wondering what should have brought him here.

More old friends ! Ticehurst, of the N—th, a brother blood of Mr. Cooly's ;

Mrs. Golightly, a beauty of whom more anon ; and the ubiquitous Skipwith. Skipwith, I may mention, stood unsuccessfully at the last election. It was more than hinted that he did not "stand" enough ; and certainly bribery would never be brought against him. His schemes for the regeneration of the nation are, for a middle-aged man, almost Utopian ; but he lives in hope, and, meanwhile, disseminates his ideas as widely as may be. He is laying down the law to a stout, elderly man, with the suspicion of a twinkle in his eye.

"Look at the root, my dear sir ; look at the root," he vociferates.

"I do, I do, nearly always," protests his auditor.

"What is the cause," continues Skipwith, oratorically, "of popular passion ? of war ? of—— ?"

"Which war?" asks the other.

"Any war," says Skipwith, shortly.

"Ah! well," replies his listener, taking up a locket on his chain, "here's the cause of the last." He opens it, displaying two little threads laid across. "The waggly one is the emperor's—extracted it from his molar the day after the declaration; the straight one with the knob was Prince ——'s, nerve of the eye-tooth—taken out the same morning. Interesting; historical, too—eh?" He snaps it sharply, and laughs. Skipwith talks no more.

"Who," I inquire, awestruck, of a bye-stander, as I leave the room to dress, "is that?"

"That is the great surgeon-dentist, Dr. McKilliquick."

CHAPTER III.

ON the way upstairs I pass the smoking-room, a circular chamber in one of the towers belonging to the oldest part of the house. Each of the windows is set in a recess twelve feet deep—for such is the thickness of the walls, and the hangings are of old red-and-yellow damask. A wood fire, sputtering cheerily behind two gleaming brass dogs, and a few knick-knacks of to-day, make it look habitable enough.

Against one side moulders a piece of arras of portentous aspect, representing some execution in the Middle Ages. A gentleman in the foreground

is having one eye bored by a large gimlet, but looks on complacently with the other, as he sits quietly, arms akimbo. A second is stretched upon a rack, and evidently thinks, with a certain poor priest who spoke from experience, that "it is a serious thing, sir, to be drawn out eighteen inches beyond one's natural stature," while a few spectators,—cripples every one of them from birth—lift their hands and look at each other in a "My! did you ever!" way. Crimson sky, with green clouds, triangular trees, and mountains considerably bigger at the top than at the bottom, complete the scene, which is interesting, as showing what changes Time works, when he has a fair field and no favour.

The bedroom allotted to me lies beyond, and is set off with a com-

panion piece of ghastly tapestry. It is a long, narrow cell, without a fireplace; there is a primeval pincushion and a pre-historic boot-jack, and besides nothing, and room for nothing but improvement. It is getting late. Everything has been unpacked for me, and so ingeniously disposed that I have been playing "hunt the slipper" ever since I came up. I have run to earth my white ties in a hat-box carefully concealed in a cupboard, and having at last extracted a fifth from the *débris* of its brethren, which proves a comparative success, I button-hole a snowy camellia lying in a nest of maiden-hair, which some unknown benefactor has left upon my table, and turn towards the drawing-room. It is perfectly dark in the passages outside, and this old part of the house is

absurdly tortuous ; there is a step up here, a step down there, and I am in process of making the discovery that my nose is longer than my arms, for it has caught a projection that they failed to do, when to my joy, the glimmer of a candle creeps slowly up in front, and then, round the corner, with a pretty bright colour in her face, her dark eyes a-glitter, and her lithe figure swaying as she steps heedlessly along, comes—I must be dreaming—my *ci-devant* companion in the train.

She recognizes me with a start, and tries to slip by, but the passage is narrow, so that she is stopped perforce ; her colour mounts till she is scarlet.

I hold out my hand and take hers unawares. "This is indeed a pleasure I did not expect. I——"

"La! sir. Let me go!" she says, snatching it away with an uneasy titter. "Don't be ridic'lous: m' lady's waiting." And with a bounce she is gone.

It is lucky I am alone and in the dark. After this I am not altogether confounded by seeing the gentleman who found the shooting indifferent at Hetherington, standing behind a chair in my vicinity at dinner.

When I reach the drawing-rooms they are brilliantly lit up, and half filled with people, most of whom eye each other superciliously, as if the distance between them were insufficient. Ten ladies sit on ten separate ottomans holding sweet commune with themselves, and fresh units drop in every minute. Here comes a venerable Eastern patriarch, hobnobbing with a minister of the Court of Morocco, who

has favoured us with his native costume—a garb more like a full dress night-shirt than anything else. Here a great mandarin of the Double Button, yellow, slit-eyed, hollow-cheeked, with hair of a visible green, and in an evening suit which fits him atrociously, is pouring compliments into the ear of a Belgravian dame, which in the vernacular sound a trifle fulsome, though she does not appear to notice it. Now Mrs. Indigo Smijthe enters and passes before my eyes, leaving them aching, as if I had gazed on the noonday sun. She is a blaze of crimson, gold, and diamonds, feathered with old lace. It is an hour of triumph, but the "Ides of March" are not over yet.

We wait a long time, and when dinner is at last announced, an instinctive movement runs through the hungry

crowd, who are beginning to block the door, as if they were going out of church. A mysterious delay occurs, which threatens, as moments run into minutes, to become dangerous. A hollow murmur rises, like the gathering of a storm; then I find out the cause. The man with the names, who was to have paired us all off nicely and quietly, is absent. The situation is bad, and grows rapidly worse. The colour flies from our hostess's face; the fact is, she knows no more of the majority of her guests than the man in the moon, and as for the precedencies and their delicate shades, no mortal woman could carry them in her head; and it is not to be expected of that well-poised little fanciful head, with its wreath of golden hair. She makes an irresolute step forward, as if

she saw some opening. Luckily, Mr. Smijthe is at his post, and leads off the van amidst the immense silent applause of the company, with a duchess—*the* duchess, I believe—and then comes chaos.

His lordship, the Bishop of Trincomalee, who has founded one or two Christian churches, and swamped half a dozen others, is harmlessly studying the diamond buckles on his shoes when, with a jerk of her fan, Mrs. Indigo says—

"My lord, will you take down this—er—lady?" half turning to a stately dame in well developed black velvet and ostrich feathers.

"Th—anks," bows his lordship lowly. "Should be charmed, but that is—er—my wife." The black velvet might be carved in ebony.

"Oh!" suggests Mrs. Indigo, turning nervously to the lady nearest her, with some return of her colour. "This one, then, if you please."

"Much obliged," bows his lordship lower than before, "but that is my daughter. If you will kindly allow me," he adds, stepping forward, "I will choose for myself." Which he forthwith does with very great discrimination. That little business of the churches does not appear to have affected the old gentleman's good taste in the least.

Meanwhile our hostess is scarlet. I, unhappily, am at hand; and with that exquisite, but somewhat subtle reasoning which distinguishes her sex, she flashes out at me with a sob—

"You might have saved me from this!"

"That bow in your hair's coming

out, Mrs. Smijthe," I reply, making a little feint of defence. "They'll go all right, if you let them."

The breach is made, and the whole force is pouring through, and some funny coupling off is the result. Mrs. Bishop defiles before my delighted eyes, leaning on the arm of the Provincial of the Jesuits; the mandarin walks away with a dark-eyed Spaniard, and, I fancy, talks no secrets during dinner; an eminent physician carries off the orphan daughter of one of his victims; eligible guardsmen bear swiftly away dowagers, who find it hard to keep pace with them; and gouty old gentlemen hobble off with frolicsome things in white and tulle illusion.

For the life of me I cannot resist it. "This is even more than you promised me," I adventure to Mrs. Indigo.

"I could slap that woman's face," she snaps, stamping her foot.

"Hush! Whose? I thought you said it was my fault?"

"Oh, I know her; she kept him on purpose. It'll ruin me! I don't care. I'll teach her!"

"Hush, hush! you'll be heard. That bow 's getting loose again."

Her bosom still heaves with the swell left by the storm, and the flowers, the locket, and the necklaces are tossed up and down like cockle-shells upon it. She looks extremely well as she walks to the glass to re-arrange the bow. This is the only known method of calming Mrs. Smijthe. So taken up am I with the good work, that everybody is at last gone, but she and her own private prince; and I am left to take myself down alone.

The table presents a picture that might have delighted a Roman emperor. Summer flowers and tropical fruits, though it is now November, stretch in brilliant bands of colour from end to end ; while in the centre a jagged berg of ice, in which are frozen a number of gold-fish, flings out a thousand prismatic tints, and four little fountains of rose-water spirt and play merrily into a miniature sea mirrored at its base ; while above, six many-branched chandeliers of old Venetian glass shower upon us the mellow radiance of their tapers. I shall say nought of the dinner, save that I lost reckoning somewhere about the twenty-second course, and that there was an ice pudding, which in solitary moments I look back upon with feelings akin even to remorse. Chance places me by Miss

Vibart, with whom I make several struggles to open a conversation, without success. Some new ideas, however, I certainly do get from her. She tells me she belongs to a club, "The Hermaphrodite" thinks it's a pity all old women don't die young; she means to. Says that she doesn't know the gentleman opposite, but that he's probably a darling, any way, by his looks; and declares with emphasis that she'd rather lose her soul than the *entrée* that has just passed, which she promptly calls back.

We come presently on to the subject of dress. According to Skipwith this in itself is a sign of progress. "When," he says, "a woman begins to be interested in you, and thinks your opinion worth having, she throws out a feeler about her dress; asks whether you like

long skirts or short, gloves with twenty-two buttons or none at all, and acts accordingly. If all prospers, a day or two later your preference is asked in the matter of shoes, and even on such important appendages thereto as bows and buckles. Things are well on by this time, and in a moment of confidential 'abandon' not twenty-four hours later, she tells you that she changes her collars and cuffs three times a week, and wants to know which you consider the more touching, stockings striped horizontally or vertically; a week after——" But here I stopped him; he is a bold, and at times, I fear, a bad man.

Miss Vibart is dressed with the most scrupulous plainness, in pure white, and has as sole ornament, a single emerald brooch at the point of her bodice. This

by itself is sufficiently startling to English eyes. Altogether, I am quite as much puzzled as interested by her. Once a stray glance strikes me on its way as it goes ricochetting down the table ; it was certainly not meant for me, and where it went I have no idea. There was a depth, a fire, a lurking light in it, which almost took my breath away ; but the next moment the big grey eyes, wide, soft, questioning, were turned full upon me ; my doubts vanished, and I could not but admit that, if she would only keep her lips closed, she might, like the British soldier, "go anywhere, and do anything."

The dropping fire of conversation becomes fainter and fainter, and at length ceases altogether. Some eighty gloves are being buttoned at the mo-

ment, there is a universal rise, and one by one the ladies sweep out. Half a dozen or more are yet left, when a voice rings suddenly through the room—

"Thank Heaven, sir! Thank Heaven! Now we may begin to enjoy ourselves."

A senile chuckle follows, then a dismayed silence, and a clearing of throats. A little wicked old man with a flaming red eye, which revolves rapidly on its axis, while its fellow, dull and dim, remains immovably fixed on vacancy, has moved close up, and leers at me for approval of the sentiment. The ladies left, look straight before them in the direction of the ceiling, and quicken their steps; not least so, our hostess.

"Come, come, Baddely," says Mr. Smijthe, stepping promptly to the front, "the wine stands with you; fill up and try the walnuts."

"What, eh?" says the old gentleman. "Eh, what?" as he settles down into his place and glares out through his reddening eye with his head on one side. He grasps the decanter, and begins to fill his glass, which takes him some time, for more goes outside than in; however, he perseveres, and obtains a bumper, about the same time that a dark puddle, the size of a small duck-pond, has formed round the base of the iceberg. "Walnuts'h? No, thanks'k; help m'shelf to this." Here he makes a plunge at a dish of preserve in front of him with his hand. He comes up as from a "header" in the deep sea; from his cuff and finger points runs off in long straight lines the viscous fluid.

There is no suppressing the general merriment. The old fellow is cowed for

the time at least, and does his best to mend matters by trying to "tub" in his finger-glass in which he is only moderately successful; while my own attention is taken up for some minutes with directing the course of the tributaries of the great central lake, to a point where they may flow innocuously upon the floor, and not into my lap.

The fun soon dies out of us, however, and we grow more and more subdued; which, as we are almost all strangers to one another, is hardly surprising, and Mr. Smijthe is again forced to the rescue.

"Papers look rather warlike to-day," he observes.

The room brightens up at once. A lean, splotched youth near, takes upon himself to answer.

"Think so? Can't agree with you;

they know better than to try and face us. Why, our cavalry alone," he says, speaking to all that end of the table, "are so immeasurably superior, that——"

"The Duke of Wellington once——" mildly puts in Mr. Smijthe; but he is drowned.

The weedy gentleman raises his voice. "Of course I am not saying so because I happened to belong to them myself. I simply state a fact."

"The Duke of Well——" again essays Mr. Smijthe.

"Look at our fellows' harness," continues the other, vouchsafing not the slightest notice. "I should like to see any fellows that would compare with our fellows! Why, the very look of them's enough."

"It is, it is," acknowledges Mr. Smijthe, soothingly. "The Du——"

It is his last effort—he sinks back into his chair, with a gulp of disgust.

"I am not contending," goes on his adversary triumphantly, with a defiant look round, "that the British cavalry," etc., etc.

Ticehurst, who sits opposite, exchanges a significant glance with me. He began his career in that particular branch, and does not altogether admire their present representative, apparently. "Quite touching on the part of a man who was kicked out of it," he remarks viciously, in an undertone.

"Well, it is," I laugh. "Who is he?"

"Lord George Pettigrew," interposes Skipwith, who has come up near, rolling it out in an impressive whisper.

"Indeed; and who is he?" I ask simply.

"He'll be one of the richest men in

the kingdom," he retorts hotly. "He'll come in for something tremendous some day."

"So I should fancy," breaks in Ticehurst, rising, "if this is his style of going on."

"Well," I reply, in a modest endeavour to keep the peace, "of course he has a position, and——"

Whereupon Ticehurst observes, "There can be little doubt as to his position, as he is universally admitted to be the biggest fool in Christendom."

Skipwith, though he says nothing, looks unhappy. The aristocracy is a thing with him too sacred to be lightly spoken of; but further trouble is prevented by a move for the drawing-room.

CHAPTER IV.

I DOUBT whether they have been quite so cheerful upstairs as we have been below. A lady who has a semi-professional aspect is playing a piece descriptive, I should say, of a "tornado." The storm is at its worst at our entry ; peal succeeds peal, crash, crash, while the chandeliers blink and tremble with the atmospheric commotion, and quite convey the impression of sheet lightning.

But I am mistaken when I say it is at its worst. Another lady, who is sitting at the piano, harmlessly, as I thought, turning over the leaves, joins

in far up in the treble, and a perfect deluge is the result.

The rain comes down in buckets, people shiver and draw their cloaks over their shoulders, and even the two performers themselves present a certain humidity of appearance, as if they had been caught out in it. This cannot last ; it is " that fierce burst which marks the end." I am right ; a roll of thunder of two minutes' duration finishes it abruptly. Now, surely they will faint together in a heap. No ! they are led away with a dazed lost look in their eyes ; and, incredible to relate, are seen about alive and well during the rest of the evening.

Presently I come upon a quiet corner where two or three fresh-looking girls are amusing themselves over a table.

" How stupid of it," says one of them.

"It never did this before ; some days it will say anything."

"Planchette, dear Planchette, do tell us why you won't speak," and she bends down over a little heart-shaped piece of wood on which their hands are placed, with a look of real earnestness in her face. One looker-on brings another. The bishop comes up and stands by half-amused, the ex-cornet follows him, and then the Patriarch, bringing with him a tall sallow American, with long black hair, cavernous eyes, and a white choker which would do honour to a Christy Minstrel, and in less than no time the three girls are the nucleus of a small crowd. The interest grows, one and all we beg and implore "Planchette" to speak, but in vain.

"How provoking!" exclaims one of them at last, looking up rather red. "I suppose we must give it up."

"What is Planchette?" says a voice somewhere in the throng.

The girl is just getting up, her wrist is raised in the act of taking her fingers off, when the machine gives, or seems to give, a jump forward, then a dig, and tears the sheet of paper almost in two.

"Hurrah!" cries the crowd, with one voice. "It's begun to move. Bring some more paper."

A quire is produced, and there is a crush round the table. The moment the fresh sheet is put under the machine it begins to write furiously, but perfectly distinctly. It stops abruptly; the sheet is snatched out from under it by a dozen hands, and displays to our bewildered gaze—

"Ha! ha! ha! the bottomless pit,
I'm one of the fiends that belong to it."

If a shell had fallen in our midst, it could hardly have dissipated us more quickly than this extraordinary couplet. The poor girl who has been prime mover in it all gets up, white as a sheet, pressing her hand to her heart. The Provincial of the Jesuits hurries away crossing himself. "Planchette" itself vanishes, not, as might be expected, in a blue flame, but in the hand of an onlooker, who with great presence of mind walks into the conservatory, and hurls it through a window. The American says aloud over our heads, that after that he "calkerlates a little sacred music would be vary appropriate."

Some one is looking at me, and by that strange intuition which we all know I suddenly become conscious of the fact, and turn sharply to see who it

is. A few steps from me, clad in black velvet, sparsely trimmed at the throat with old yellow point, stands one of the finest specimens of womanhood that perhaps it was ever my fortune to see; at least, so it occurs to me at the moment.

She must be quite five feet ten, and loses none of it as she stands drawn up straight as a dart. She is not exactly beautiful, but there is a force of character in her face which is astonishing, and impresses me at once; this, together with a certain squareness of shoulder, and line of figure indicative of latent strength, produce an effect very masculine on many points. We stand eyeing one another with the calm aggressive stare, so eminently admissible on such occasions. She lowers her eyes at last, and turns away

with a half smile, which irritates while it attracts, but her eyes fascinate me. I can only give an idea of their power by saying, that I feel as if I had been turned morally inside out, and not a little discomfort is the result. That she was rather amused than otherwise by the scene which has just taken place is quite plain. Who can she be? My speculations on this point are cut short.

The suggestion as to sacred music is received with acclamation, and the right man comes forward, who recognizes his time, and seizes it—a young colourless curate, answering to the name of Pucklechurch, who forthwith presses one of the Planchette ladies into his service. She, I fancy, looks upon it in the light of an expiation for her share in the late impiety, and skips out

of her place at his bidding. He has a fair ear, but no voice, and in the high passages occasionally strains himself to such an extent as to make one feel for his friends. He sings a song—what, it matters not—and receives certainly his full meed of applause. Perhaps because he did not expect so much, perhaps because the demon is not yet fully exorcised, he begins a second. The remedy is worse than the disease; after a few bars we could welcome the fiend back with open arms. Indeed, we get him, for two or three of the golden youth rising to the occasion, surround Mr. Pucklechurch, and a very little encouragement induces him to give us a song which he accompanies himself, and in which there is no nearer approach to the sacred than the d——, who, in com-

pany with King Arthur and a certain little tailor, disports himself to the music.

Cantorini, the great tenor, who is only here by special favour for this one night, sits in a corner, his hand over his face, and great beads of perspiration standing on his brow. He is bearing it like a man ; but a convulsive twitching of his left leg at intervals shows what is the agony he is suffering. Chorus, Mr. Pucklechurch leading, hoarse and limp—

“So the miller was drowned in his dam,
And the weaver was hung in his yarn,
And the dev——”

But that is all that we ever hear. Mrs. Smijthe has reached the scene of action, and everything collapses at once. The golden youth melt away, and Mr. Pucklechurch, after four in-

effectual efforts to find the chord of the key-note, gives it up, comes down anywhere, and hurriedly disappears. I conclude the wretched man is bonneted, for we see him no more.

Among other mantles that have come upon Mrs. Smijthe that of "art" has descended and clothed her like a garment. She proved herself, as usual, a wise woman, and realizing that truth in decorative art is to be attained by nothing short of a technical education, placed the matter in the hands of Tynte Daubigny, R.A., and they say handed him a cheque for thirty thousand pounds when the rooms were finished. This is quite possible, for the furniture, bronzes, carpets, were all selected by him, and here and there his own brush touched the walls, which means money. The rooms which he

did, five in number, are masterpieces, and worthy of a palace. His office has been an important one, for nothing is introduced down to a teaspoon without his sanction, and, furthermore, he designs all our hostess's dresses, which can be no light work.

As I ramble about, I come upon the great artist himself, surrounded by a bevy of young ladies, to whom he is showing a sketch-book. Daubigny is a small æsthetic looking man, who appears to have sacrificed his body to his soul, until he has become almost ethereal. He is known to his familiars by the soubriquet of "the gentle;" and how a man so gentle ever pushed his way up in this rude world into the place he now holds is a puzzle. He had very little money and no connection; but he began young, and

painted a strange picture with a funny name, "The Ark rounding the Noah," or something of the kind; I forget exactly. At any rate, a celebrity discovered in it a species of new revelation, and wrote an essay to prove that in his peculiar handling lay the lost secret of Apelles. So by degrees he grew, and shortly after he inaugurated an entirely new style, which, as it fell in with the whim of the day, became the rage; and long before middle age his success was astonishing. Happy accidents combined to make him, and his talents kept him on the place he had won. Like Skipwith, he is a species of exotic, bred in the hothouse of our civilization, and possible at no other time than our own.

In fine contrast to him are some of the group, more particularly one young

person in white muslin, who has appropriated the sketch-book, and sits in the centre, with her toes pointing inwards, turning over the leaves. Pasty-faced, heavy, with no particular mark to show where one feature begins or another ends, huge hands and arms, though fairly white; a figure like a chest of drawers; she is of that sort who wear gaiters on muddy days, and boots in which poor Daubigny would probably be lost. Strong and honest, no doubt, unpleasantly blunt, and with scarcely an attraction that belongs to her sex, whose grievances are her everlasting theme. One meets such women by scores. It is a pity the service is not open to them, for they would make admirable private soldiers. As it is, nothing is left for them but to cavil and sneer at the little attractive weak-

nesses of their more fortunate sisters, which they do in a way that puts to shame the sternest misogynist.

But if they despise weakness in their own sex, what words will express their contempt for it in the other? Daubigny's good-nature has led him among thieves.

"Sweetly pretty," is the first remark I hear. "'Sunrise by moonlight;' but what's that?" Here the lady presses an ungloved finger of no very fascinating aspect over a piece of "distance" up into the clouds.

Daubigny winces, but explains.

The sisterhood applaud, and one of them says there was a moonlight scene in their parlour at Tenby, where they were last summer, which it reminds her of.

The muslin one continues, "Poor

Charley Faddle! Do you know Charley, Mr. Daubigny? No? He's a cripple, poor boy! and we thought it would be so nice for him if he could take up this sort of thing; such a resource. He began last May, and paints flowers and shells and things quite beautifully now. You should get him to show them to you."

The artist fidgets, colours slightly, and evidently wishes he had never let the portfolio out of his hand.

At this moment his tormentor, for the benefit of some one behind who "can't see," lifts it up by the middle. The back gives at once, as a matter of course, the book takes a pyramidal form, and two or three loose sketches flutter down on either side among the skirts.

The artist, Skipwith, who has joined

us, and myself are on our hands and knees in a second, groping in the dark; seeing which, the exhibitor just shakes out her dress, looks down, and says, "Oh! I beg pardon; under my foot. I didn't see any go there."

Daubigny emerges at last, very red in the face, and says, with a ghastly smile, all that the usages of society will permit, namely, that he is rather pleased than otherwise, and so on.

"‘Study of pearls.’ How pretty! What’s this? ‘Herd of swine feeding.’ Oh, how natural they are!" goes on the lady, airily. "You don’t do caricatures, Mr. Daubigny, do you?"

Mr. Daubigny repudiates the idea.

To her companion, "Do you remember, Lucy, how splendidly Bob used to draw them? You should," etc., etc.

Here a servant comes up, bringing tea and coffee in a number of little opaline mugs, on an arabesqued silver tray, which, no doubt, came from Birmingham after a prosperous voyage *via* Tetuan. Most of the ladies help themselves, and a man who follows with muffins and biscuits is decidedly popular, notably with the show woman. My respect for the author of the sketches is fast vanishing. If he allows this, he is weak—weak as water, aye, as the tea that threatens him on all sides. The pictures are gems of water-colour painting. He ought to be protected from himself.

"Can't you rescue the book?" I whisper to Skipwith.

He shakes his head. "Don't know 'em; daren't."

Sitting among the rest is a little old

lady, whose kindness of spirit beams out through her small spectacled eyes. That things are not going smoothly she has discerned, and she makes a gallant effort to set them right.

"We were in town this year," she says, addressing Daubigny, and speaking in a distinct mincing voice; "my daughter and myself, and we saw your pictures at the Academy; and, oh! the frames they were quite too lovely!" She lifts a little withered pair of black-mittened hands. "Ally, love," she goes on to one of the girls, "go and fetch that pretty sketch you did for my birthday at Venice. I am sure Mr. Daubigny would like to see it."

"Oh, no, ma!" answers the young lady appealed to; "these are so much better than that."

"Yes, lovey; do as I tell you,"

says her mother, in tones of gentle reproof.

So the picture comes. It is a wonderful production, about three inches square, and Daubigny looks at it all ways before he decides upon the right one, and even then the water is running uphill and the "Bridge of Sighs" is running down.

"It is not a literal sketch, you know. It is an idealization, a dream; a dream, in fact, of Venice," explains the old lady, fondly gazing, and showing him how to get it in the best light.

At this point Skipwith becomes troubled with something in his throat. Meanwhile the tea is drunk, and I breathe again, when our friend begins to turn over the book (from the bottom of the page) with one hand, and to eat muffin with the other.

This is too much. Daubigny starts up, stung into courage. "Pardon me," he says, "but——"

Too late! a piece of buttered muffin, half an inch square, falls on to the sky of a sunset. It might perhaps even yet be blown off, and do little injury; but she, thinking it may escape notice, jerks over the next leaf; and to all time that, and probably two or three next to it, will carry the marks, and be comparatively valueless.

The unhappy man raises his hand with a gesture of despair, glares at her for an instant, and then, not trusting himself to speak, rushes from the room.

"What a very odd person!" she says, looking as if the seat of her chair had grown suddenly prickly, but going on with the book, and trying to carry it off.

"Sort of wriggled like, didn't he?" says the American, in a nasal whisper.

"There you see girlish nature in all its untutored grace," remarks Skipwith, *sotto voce*.

He is a man without belief in woman, for which he possibly has his own good reasons. Young unmarried girls he simply ignores, as being out of the pale of a rational man's notice ; and, as a consequence, the young ladies make very cutting and sarcastic remarks about him behind his back, which he might feel acutely if he could only hear them. But here and there retribution has overtaken him ; where a girl he has previously ignored marries into a position in which she might be useful to him, and takes the ignoring into her own hands, so revenging her sex.

I do not stop to argue with him, but walk off into the main room, and find Cantorini at the piano, playing with a certain decision about his bass, which proves he has not forgotten or forgiven the last performer. He crashes down a few melodious discords, and then begins to sing a little Italian song. People are quiet enough at first, but soon begin to talk, and finally to laugh amongst themselves. The song ends abruptly, like the last. In the middle of a verse he stops dead, and rises. It is quite plain that we are rather an unruly team, and that Mrs. Smijthe has not got the whiphand of us yet. All the world says, "Thank you *so* much!" which perhaps, under the circumstances, is hardly complimentary.

This is probably his idea, for he goes straight up to Mrs. Smijthe,

shakes hands with her, and says, "Good-night."

All we want, sheep-like, is a lead, and the move becomes general. Skip-with can no longer retain his glass in his eye, but has to go through the exhausting process of holding it there; indeed, we are all tired out.

CHAPTER V.

IT is a foolish thing to begin to think of a fresh pair of eyes at bed-time, yet I am weak enough to do so, and pay the penalty in long hours of wearied sleeplessness. In vain I try to drive away the recollection, tossing to and fro; but I am haunted by strong dark eyes, fixed always upon mine, and as yet the name even of their owner is unknown to me. Very gradually the impression wears off, and a new fancy takes its place.

A most unusual commotion is going on. It is—— No, it isn't—— Yes, it is an execution, and this is fifteen

hundred and something, as I thought it was. There is the old Town Hall, with its four turrets bigger than the building itself; and there are the men looking out from the towers of the city gate. They will have to spend their lives there, for they are very big men, and the towers fit them so tightly that they can never expect to get out. Now the crowd comes forth. See how gallantly the gentleman on the wooden horse leads the way as they drag the wretched victims to the scaffold. But why am I here? Am I only a casual observer, or am I a heretic? And to be burnt accordingly? I cannot be sure. "This is hard, and I only came by the last train to-night," I murmur. Nobody seems to know quite whether this will be an excuse; and at any rate, I am

not the first. A man, bound hand and foot, is brought up to be burned at the stake. The judge takes his seat and mops his brow. It is warm work, a fire like this on a hot day. The band strikes up, people crowd into their places, a squire in armour offers each a programme, and a lady in a steeple cap is going round between the rows with ices. Will I have a book of the words? "We usually takes a shilling for them." "No, thank you." Then "I'll——" The big bell of the cathedral tolls solemnly. The culprit is already bound to the stake, the fire is creeping up, it licks his feet, folds itself round his legs, and climbs to his waist. Heavens, what a cry!

The judge wags his head pleasantly, and takes a pinch of snuff. "We must

keep the pot a boiling," he says with a cheery smile, and a nod towards me. Instantly two men-at-arms rush forward and seize me. "Not now, not now," I shriek. "Have pity, my lord. I only came by the last train this evening, and I have a return ticket which will be wasted if——" A howl more frightful even and prolonged than the last dins in our ears. He cannot hear what I say, yet his features gradually relax until I can see the stitches in them. Everything is arrested, the men-at-arms stand still, he at the stake struggles no more, and even the flames, though of a burning crimson, no longer flicker, but rest softly, like sunbeams on the wall. I cannot make it out. The bell of the cathedral is still vibrating in the air, but I see now plainly enough that the building is only worked in a

sort of cross stitch. Why doesn't that man die instead of howling like that? But then, if I can see the threads where his body has worn thin, it cannot be he that is howling after all. Besides, nothing less than a fiend could utter such a yell as that. Well, at any rate, I am not to be burned, that's something; but why do they sit there looking at me? I cannot understand it.

It is some minutes before I am fully awake, and alive to the fact that I am staring at the piece of tapestry on the wall, upon which bright spots of coloured moonlight fall through two small quatrefoils of stained glass in the window. The gradual shifting of the flaming spot from the stake to the end of the judge's nose, finally convinces me that I have been dreaming. But it was not all a dream. The stable clock

strikes the quarter, and a renewed outburst of howling is the result. There is a dog (who must be by his voice the size of a jackass at least), immediately below my window. The tones have a hideously human ring in them, and every now and then he throws in a kind of death rattle by way of effect. It is incredible that an animal should utter the sounds and live ; yet he does, and before he finishes I have ample time for regretting the hour in which I was born.

"Was you aweer it's height o'clock, sir?" I must have dozed off again. A stolid square-built man, trimly cropped, stands at the bedside, bringing tea in a black cup sprayed with pink May blossom. He carries in his face a certain imperturbability, and an expression of respectful obstinacy. I should

say he suffers from domestic affliction in a small degree, but not in such as to hinder his putting on flesh.

"What time's breakfast?"

"Breakfast, sir, his hall hours. They begin it mostly about seven at these 'ere times, and ends it mostly about eleven thirty."

"What! Do you mean to say the ladies——?"

"No, m'lord, no. 'Tis only the gents as is going out fishin' or shootin' and the like——"

"Oh, I understand. By-the-by, what was that frightful row in the night?"

"Gaspar, sir."

"And who the mischief is Gaspar?"

"He's a dorg, yer 'ighness, big dorg. But law! 'e ain't what 'e used to be!"

"If so, I am glad I did not meet him in his prime," I remark.

"Aye, colonel," he answers, with a chuckle of retrospection, "gents often ask after 'im in the mornin's. If yer'll believe me, yer grace, that there dorg's a character."

"I can easily believe it," I answer, suspecting my informant is a little inclined that way himself. He is evidently a simple Puddleshire native, his accent tells as much, dating from the first epoch of Mrs. Smijthe's advancement. He has been unable to keep pace with the times, and the big names have been too many for him. He scatters his titles at random.

"'E 'ad a hinjury to 'is 'ead, sir, last Whitsuntide, and 'e's never bin the same dorg since. Flighty like ; does things as 'e never would a done afore it 'appened. Seems just as though 'is principles was gone. For a long time 'e

grewed wickeder every day, and there wasn't no curin' of 'im. If you licked 'im fur anything, 'e'd go and do it again twice, just to show 'e wouldn't be interfered with. 'E was werry bad at times; eat up 'arf the stable door one night, and dragged 'is kennel right through the flower-beds in front of the 'ouse a purpose like, until 'e got to the sunk cucumber frames the other side, when they both tumbled through together, and broke five pounds' worth o' glass, let alone cucumbers. 'E took such a 'atred of 'is kennel after that, 'e bit it to pieces the very next week, and ate most nigh all the roof. And law, sir, 'e *were* ill after it, but 'e got over it. 'Owever, 'e don't try such tricks now, 'e's too old, and 'e ain't got no teeth; but 'e's got claws, and 'e's took up another line. 'E'll go out

and 'e'll dig 'is own grave ten times a day, may be ; 'e don't care where, but flower-beds 'e prefers. One night 'e 'ad up the better part of the stable yard, another 'e lifted out and carried orf two yards o' drain pipe ; but lately 'e's lost 'is sperrit altogether, and when 'e's dug the 'ole, 'e'll sit in it, and 'owl by the hour. And the master, 'e won't 'ave 'im touched, cause 'e says 'e knows 'e'll die soon, and is repenting like ; but, asking yer pardon, I don't believe it's sorer for what 'e 'as done, but sorer for what 'e can't do no longer. You can tell by 'is heye, m'lord ; h'eve a wickeder heye nor a Christian."

Here my informant ends abruptly, as if half ashamed of his own eloquence. It is a remarkable case, and bears out the doctrine of the transmigration of

souls in the most forcible manner. In a prior state of existence, the dog must have been a Trappist—one of that order who sleep every night in their coffins, and only speak to pronounce the words "Memento mori." My new valet silently arranges things, and is just going, when he turns back.

"Er—hem!" he coughs, drawing himself up to attention like an old soldier. "Was you aweer that a menoo of hour proceedin's his published hevery mornin', your worship?"

"A what?"

"A menoo, squire, they calls 'em."

"What do you mean?"

He takes a small frame from the chimney-piece, and hands it to me. The card it encloses is printed (for the palace possesses an elaborate press), with a programme for every hour of

the day—an original document, conceived on a most liberal scale.

"Will you be for the cathedral, yer honour, this morning?" he asks, taking it back.

"Cathedral? You haven't got a——"

"We've got a bishop in the first suite, and a dean on the third floor," he replies sternly, "and" (piling up the case) "likewise 'is good lady." And he leaves the room, as much as to say, "We take all this trouble to get these people together, and make things pleasant for you, and then you go and cavil at a mere form of words." I feel remorseful. Besides, he has proved his point; it will be a lesson to me not to correct a man again, unless I am certain that he is right and I am wrong.

The day is clouded, but not heavily;

bright patches of white and blue break in at intervals, and through the gaps fitful gleams of autumn sunshine burst on to the broad, sloping expanse of the park and the wooded hills beyond. There is a slight hoar-frost, and each gleam of light strikes a diamond-mine of ready cut and polished jewels. Down where the river runs hangs a thin white mist, through which the clumps of trees, half seen, rise mysteriously, in fanciful resemblance to the ruins of an old city. It is the picture of an idle day—a wintry summerishness still lingers in the air—idle it shall be. I will hang about the house, renew my friendship with Kynaston and Mrs. Golightly, inspect the improvements, snub Skipwith when he requires it, make love to the heiress, and find out all about those black eyes, which have left

dark rings under mine this morning.
"I'll have that dog shot! I'll—— H'm!"

As I go downstairs, I meet Mrs. Smijthe on the landing. It is a solemn scene: a dozen ancestors, in trunk-hose, wig, doublet, and even in armour, look down upon us from the walls; but my awe of them is somewhat mitigated by my knowledge of the fact that the date of my birth is considerably prior to the date of the oldest among them—a score of years, or so, at a venture. When money and taste are at the helm, these small matters can be arranged so simply and well.

"Good morning," says my hostess, advancing with outstretched hand and elastic step. "This is most fortunate, for I wanted to say a word to you. You know, I'm depending on you for *everything*," and she smiles the smile

that has turned so many wise men into fools.

"Naturally," I reply, resigning myself under its influence.

"Don't laugh," she explains, half petulantly. "You will help me, won't you? You know how important it is. Now, look here, this is what you've got to do. Get near that horrid old man who tells stories, and keep him quiet—I was on thorns all yesterday evening at dinner—and, whatever you do, don't let him come to the point: cough, laugh, get a fit, do *anything*. And do try, if you can, and swamp that American giant at the same time. Oh, that's not half," she adds, catching sight of my face. "I want you to take the Patriarch in hand, and talk a little Greek to him; it pleases him *so* much. And then the duchess—if

you could get in with her, and tell her about your relations, connections—which is it? And, oh! by-the-by, yes—just do show Mr. Daubigny your portfolio; he takes such an interest in anything of the kind. And, yes, most important of all, keep off the men—the wrong ones, I mean—from the heiress. Poor child! she—— But I must tell the rest some other time. Now, remember, I trust you."

"Mrs. Smijthe, stay, please!"

But she is already in the breakfast-room with her guests. It strikes me that my "menu" might as well be made out separately.

I find a chair by Mrs. Golightly (*née* Bedwyn) at breakfast, which is what I wanted, for she represents one or two abstruse problems which I vainly endeavour to solve on every occasion of

our meeting. She is so very generally known, that I am tempted to state one or two facts concerning her, to which I can speak from experience.

Rather more than twenty-five years ago, I first met Mrs. Golightly, then Mrs. Askew, a young matron. I was the merest child at the time. She used to nurse me in her lap, and on one occasion, unless memory is treacherous, she carried me out squalling from the room, and "whopped" me in secret with her own fair hand. But let bygones be bygones. Owing, perhaps, to my extreme youth, we were on terms of considerable intimacy, as the foregoing sufficiently proves. On the whole, she was kind to me, and I loved her. But there were two little Askews whom I hated—a boy and a girl. Though I say little, they were bigger than I was,

and, having ascertained that fact, took advantage of it to make life a burden to me. How well I remember her at that early period. She had hair as black as the raven's wing, a clear Madonna-like face, and wore rich, many-flounced dresses of sober hue, and sandals, with elastic crossings, over white open-work stockings. She and her belongings, and I and mine, were staying at the house of a mutual relation in the Midlands, and every Tuesday morning (it was an odd thing, but did not strike me at the time) she used to drive to the station in the pony-carriage, go off by the early train, and spend the day in London. She would return in time for dinner in the evening, and always came back looking so fresh and pretty, that every one said these little trips did her a world of

good—and she would admit as much herself. Her complexion was something angelic.

* * * * *

Ten or twelve long years rolled away. I was, one fine morning, airing my first tail-coat under the colonnade at Wiesbaden, when I noticed a young lady, trimly made, wearing a short dress cut into points, leaning on the arm of a young gentleman, who was a stranger to me, and talking in a very lively and vivacious manner. Straw-coloured hair had just come in, and straw, shot with pale gold, and in immense quantities, was hers. I was petrified, for as she came up there was no mistaking her—it was Mrs. Askew! I stopped short, open-mouthed, and gasped her name. Nothing could have been nicer or in stronger contrast to my *gaucherie* than

her manner. She recognized me at once (or said she did), introduced me to her *husband*, Mr. Golightly, a slim-looking youth with a twirled moustache (Mr. Askew was a heavyish man of forty or fifty), and ended by taking me back to lunch with them, when I learned that they were on their wedding tour! I did not like to be impertinent and ask questions, but took the gifts the gods provided, and was silent; although I did manage to stammer out a question as to the welfare of my old enemies, the "children," and was told they were still at school. Now, I had left school a year, and I congratulated myself on the way that Time avenges all things. But I asked no more, and before I went that night she gave me a bow from her slipper, which she snipped off on purpose, and which I took, although

what I was to do with it I had no very definite idea.

This was while Golightly went out for a smoke; for at that period I was uncertain as to whether smoking agreed with me or not.

The "happy couple" left next day, and I did not meet her for another two years; when an afternoon in May brought us together again. Golightly was not there. She was pale, and inclined to be interesting; and sang a semi-sacred song to her own accompaniment. It had a pretty little moral, I remember, and was much applauded by the company. I noticed, as she rose from the piano, that she wore an enormous *châtelaine*, and a rosary of antique silver beads at her waist; and that six inches of Hindoo bangle fell over one wrist; there was a meek look

of fervour in her eyes. I asked after the children, and got no answer but a sigh; after Golightly, and the corner of her eyes twinkled with sudden moisture. Then I asked no more, but talked to her soothingly of astronomy, which happened to be the subject of the moment; her ideas thereupon were crude, and scarcely worth repeating.

We have met frequently since then; Golightly, I am happy to say, turned up all right, and when on visits, they are sometimes even in the same house together. But the children—Ah! there's the rub. Where are "the little Askews?" My own impression, or perhaps I should say suspicion, that the boy is commanding a station somewhere in the South Pacific, and the girl mellowing into the sere and yellow, with a flock of grown-up daughters around

her, after all is only a suspicion ; and perhaps I ought not to mention it. All I know for a fact is, that on this particular morning Mrs. Golightly sits beside me ; her hair still of a pale gold, her complexion clear, white, soft, but unnatural ; her figure much as when I first saw her, if anything a trifle more severely trained. She is dressed in faint blue and amber, with silver ornaments and pearls. During the whole of breakfast she nurses a fluffy white dog in her lap, who holds decided opinions of his own ; for after eyeing Skipwith, who is sitting opposite, in a most aggressive manner for some minutes, he bursts into a furious bark, and makes for him across the table. His mistress, however, catches him in time, and requests Skipwith to put down his eye-glass, for the dog "cannot

The day is uneventful. Skipwith and I have our little spar, as I anticipated in the course of the morning. I am writing letters in the bay of the library window when he comes up. He is so extremely affable, that I guess in a moment what has taken place; he has encountered the gentleman who waits on me, who I find by the way rejoices in the name of "Goby," and that individual has addressed him as "yer grace." I am so convinced of this that I hint as much. He turns very red, looks hot, and blurts out something about its being "very natural," "Lot of good people," "One for another," and so on.

"Oh! exactly."

"What are you doing here?" he says more graciously, as I go on writing.

"Hush! you put me out, seven and two's nine, and four's thirteen, three and carry ten. I was just adding up the viscounts; how many commoners, such as yourself, for instance, run to the vis——"

"Lessenden, you're an——"

What, I never unfortunately ascertained, for the door slams behind him. It is marvellous what fools your clever fellows are on their weak points.

When I leave the library, I find the house almost empty; at any rate the people I most wished to see are gone out, nor to all my inquiries as to who the lady was who so impressed me last night, can I get a satisfactory answer, and I begin to fear she must have been some chance visitor whom I may never see again.

Later on, I go out for a solitary

stroll in the grounds. "Haversham" is a place which has been "making" for eight centuries, and the growth of timber, notably of some of the yews, is almost unexampled ; but all that had been done previously, is as nothing to the prodigious result of the last few years. Valleys have been filled, hills laid low, rivers turned, ferneries, pineries, greenhouses, hothouses, mushroomries, heronries, have been established ; statues, fountains, summer-houses, terraces, and cascades have been planned and carried out ; and a wild tract of sheltered mountain moorland tamed and transformed into a winter garden. I have it on good authority that in that time a hundred and fifty thousand pounds were laid out upon the entourage of the palace. One spot, however, is untouched.

Some time in the beginning of the last century, the then owner of "Haversham," bitten with the pseudo-classic mania of his time, built upon the crest of the hills a summer-house or temple of white marble; round it he planted ash-trees, aspens, and other sad and sober-hued shrubs; then he cut avenues through the woods, which decreased in size as they neared it; and in the foreground, close to the house, he placed thickets of holly and yew, and lived happy in the triumph of a false perspective. But he, like the rest of us, had enemies; and these enemies used to take people to the temple, to see the wrong side of the picture, which tradition says annoyed him very much. Be this as it may, the white columns still crown the little hill; and as the view is wide, and the

conceit an amusing one, it is a favourite haunt with visitors.

The dead leaves are drifting down the woodland paths, and the air, still soft and laden with their fragrance, sighs through the naked branches, as I make my way towards the spot. A gleam of sunshine drifts across the scene, lighting into a faint glow the slender marble shafts on the hill-top, and, falling softly into the valley beyond, it gilds the weather-worn towers of an old manor-house that nestles on the outskirts of the wood, and touches the vane of the Minster church in the mists of the distance with a point of flame.

I then notice that a statue has been placed in the temple; the effect from here is rather successful. It is the sitting figure of a girl, her face resting on her hand; she seems to

watch with sad eyes the sunlight as it fades from off the face of the hill and the turrets of the old house. The easy grace of the figure is admirable, and I begin to climb the ascent to take a better look when—— I stop suddenly; the figure has risen from the pedestal, and for a moment stands clear against the sky, a lady, hooded, who glances towards where I stand, and then flits swiftly into the shades of the sombre woods that clothe the hill.

My first instinct is to follow in pursuit, forgetting that I have no possible pretext for such a course; perhaps I should have gone, but on the road below sounds the thunder of hoofs. I look down, half-expecting to see her, and then descend the bank. A lady comes certainly, but she is in a black habit, much splashed, and rides

what might fitly be described as a charger. Straight and square, hand on hip, she sits, as she comes at a gallop. She rides alone, and she it is who spoiled my rest last night. Instantly I forget everything else. I look up straight at her as she passes; she appears not to see me. A numerous party come clattering on behind her, among them the heiress and Kynaston; the latter, seeing who it is, good-naturedly pulls up.

"Tell me," I say hurriedly, with an eagerness I can hardly dissemble, and which I am half-ashamed of the next moment, "who is that?"

"Which?"

"The lady on ahead."

"Oh!" he says, with an inflection of voice I do not quite understand, "that is Lady Waverleigh."

"That doesn't tell me very much."

He does not rise to the hint. "We made a riding party to Cowley Bridge," he continues; "the ladies thought it was almost too cold for driving. I was looking for you before we started. The Abbey is well worth seeing;" and he trots on to join the rest.

The night closes in rapidly as I follow them towards the palace. Married, eh? h'm! Well, he must have been a bold man who proposed to her. What wonderful eyes! I seemed to feel them through the darkness. She has an extraordinary face, the face of a leader of men. Why was Kynaston so short about her? Why has Mrs. Smijthe never spoken of her? To hide a city on a hill would be easier than to hide that face among a crowd.

CHAPTER VI.

THE lottery of dinner (all prizes, no blanks) assigns me Mrs. Treadwell, the bishop's wife; a fact of which Mrs. Smijthe duly warns me when I make my appearance in the drawing-room; for she has taken the precaution to-day of having a duplicate list made out, which she keeps herself.

I am rather staggered by the news. Had I known earlier, I might have gradually worked myself up for it; but at the eleventh hour! Besides, a little bird has told me, where and when I know not, that she wears "the breeches,"

an assertion which, of course, I have no opportunity of verifying. It is even implied that it was *she* who swamped the churches, and her very ample proportions bear this out to some extent, or may perhaps have suggested it; I cannot say. Already she looms in the distance, "an epoch," as M. Victor Hugo would say, "in claret and purple." Something must be done. Here my eye catches the gilded lettering of an Encyclopedia. I seize the idea on the instant, and with it one of the volumes. Tr—Try—Trin—here it is.

"'Trincomalee. Important maritime town; noble harbour; old part consists of three or four hundred rush-built huts. Objects of interest: a big tank and little pagoda.' Pop—pop—pop—where's the pop? Doesn't put it. Will say ten per cent. Gives three or four thousand

native inhabitants; allow an extra hundred for vagabonds, and government officials, and——

"There's the gong! Never mind; that'll do." I jot down the chief points in short on my cuff; armed with that, I can face her. It may be important at some future time to have access to her, who knows? These big people can bring pressure to bear on other quarters besides their own. "Let me see! Wasn't it there Brown of Caius went? At any rate, if it wasn't, it was somewhere else. I know they were niggers, and he told some uncommonly stiff yarns on their behalf when we dined together last time he was in England. They'll help to weigh down the scales."

Mrs. Treadwell does not think much of me I can tell (she wanted Pettigrew

I suspect), and few words pass between us, until a "hiatus" occurs in the dinner, which necessitates some conversation. I have not been fortunate in the desultory attack with which I commenced; now, to bring up the guns, I glance at my cuff. "Import. mar. town." I will begin at the beginning.

"You must find our climate a great relief after the tropics."

"Well! yes, on the whole; but in Trincomalee we enjoy every contrivance for tempering the great heat."

"Ah! a charming place, I have heard. I should much like to pay it a visit." She brightens, and relaxes visibly, "Great place for imports," I continue, "if I remember right?"

She looks puzzled. "Yes? I don't know of any," she says thoughtfully.

"Marvellous town, though, isn't it?"

I go on hurriedly, fearing something wrong.

"Well," she says, "it is curious in some respects, especially to strangers."

Not very encouraging so far. I glance again at my sleeve. "Nob. harb. old pt." meets my eye.

"And there is a nobby—I mean, a very fine harbour, which is full of old punts?"

"I don't remember any particular punts," she rejoins severely.

I am floundering in the most disgraceful way, still "*tout peut se rétablir.*" I have yet the big tank and the little pagoda to fall back upon. I fire them off both at once. It has just the effect I anticipate, and changes the fortunes of the day. A thousand old associations are stirred up by the mention of them. It appears that when

they were not in the little pagoda, they passed their time in the big tank, and *vice versa*. She becomes at once gracious and bland, neglects the next four *entrées*, and turns three-quarters towards me. Is not the talk of his or her obscure corner of the big world meat and drink in itself to the colonist?

"Now," she says, smiling fondly upon me, with her plump arms crossed—"now, what would you think our population was? You'll never guess."

"Well," I drawl, settling my cuff, and thereby getting a full view of my calculation—"well, perhaps three thousand six hundred."

"And fifty-three," she puts in triumphantly. "Really, it is quite interesting to find a person who—— But what pretty sleeve-links, Mr. Lessenden. *May* I look?"

"Oh, certainly," I say, with a shiver at the nearness of the danger, and twisting the other cuff and link round, I hold it before her.

Happily she is satisfied, and goes on.

"I was saying how pleasant it is to meet a person so well acquainted as yourself with a place in connection with which I have so many associations. You surely must have friends there?"

"Well, I had," I reply dubiously. Shall I bring Brown in, or shall I let him off? The dinner is yet young, and I really want him, so I decide on the former.

"A particular friend of mine, an old school-fellow"—here a tinge of sadness creeps into my voice, which I detect and banish at once—"a Mr. Brown—Brown of Caius. You may

have heard of him ; eminent, though so young a man in his own line " (which was "claret-cup," by-the-by) ; "spent years in the neighbourhood as a missionary."

She leans forward listening, lips apart. "There was a Mr. Brown ; in fact, there were two," she says reflectively ; "but one left just as we went out, and the other went out just as we left."

"Ah ! I fear you missed him. An excellent man, madam, quite an example to others. I remember once hearing that he and the Catholic priest were asked to dine at mess. Example always was Brown's forte, and after dinner, when the wine had been round once or twice, he, thinking to set the priest an example, rose, and making a few apologies of the usual kind, said that he really must say good-night, and

left accordingly. Certainly he had another forte, and that was whist; so after giving the priest half an hour to clear out, he ventured quietly back, found the coast clear of his rival, and sat down in a snug corner to enjoy his rubber, and a brandy-and-soda. He had hardly played the first hand, when the door opposite opened, and the priest put his nose in, and said that he thought he might possibly find half an hour or so for a rubber after all. At this precise juncture their eyes met, and I believe that they gave up setting each other examples ever after."

"Dear me!" says my auditor, laughing, with an appreciation of the story that encourages me.

"You never met his wife?"

She shakes her head.

"Ah, she was a nice plump little

woman, with cheeks like a ripe apple, but quite unsuited for her position."

"Indeed! They weren't well matched, perhaps?"

"On the contrary, never were a couple more happily; but she was so tempting a morsel, that before they had been there three weeks he discovered there was a plot hatching to make soup of her. Poor Brown felt it very much, for the ringleader was a man whom he had converted ten days before. I believe the ruffian did urge this much in his own defence, that since his conversion he never dreamt of tasting any one who was not properly cooked!"

"You astonish me. I never heard of anything of the kind there. They must have been a long way in the interior."

"Yes, a goodish way, I fancy. He had to send Mrs. Brown home, after all; it wasn't safe. He had some extraordinary experiences."

"Marvellous! I must really tell his lordship. I am sure he had no idea that such things had ever occurred within the limits of his diocese. You see the interior——"

"That reminds me of another painful case that came under his notice. A young chief of great influence came to him one day, saying he wished to become one of his flock. Mr. Brown, metaphorically speaking, jumped at him. On inquiry, however, it turned out that he, the chief, was blessed with fourteen blushing brides, an obstacle too serious to be overlooked. The chief pleaded hard. Might he keep half? No? Three, then? What, only one? He

extolled their perfections and various charms. 'No,' said my friend in his most impressive manner (he could be very impressive at times), 'you may keep the one you love best, but you must put the rest away.' The poor young chief was much disheartened. 'You'll give me time?' he said. 'Certainly; such a step is not to be taken without due consideration.'

"About three weeks later on, Brown was out walking, and they met. He would hardly have recognized him. The poor fellow looked dreadfully ill. The whites of his eyes were yellow, and he complained bitterly of want of sleep at night, bad dreams, and of violent dyspepsia.

"'You must be more careful about your diet, my young friend. I'll send you a tonic that'll pick you up, and

give you an appetite,' said the missionary (remember he was new to the place).

"The chief's eyes glistened. They rubbed noses and parted; for Brown, seeing him so upset, did not like to stop and discuss the other little matter just then. A week or two after, a messenger from the chief suddenly appeared, and said his master was dying. Brown hurried off in great distress, and found his unhappy friend stretched upon a mattress of palm leaves, apparently *in extremis*.

"'Who would have thought it?' groaned the wretched man, rolling his eyes horribly, 'and they looked so soft and digestible. I had a big dinner-party last night, my Christian friend, and we've finished them at last; but I fear they've finished me. Oh!'

He gave a fearful groan. 'But it's all right,' he continued. 'I've put 'em all away, as you told me, and now you——'

"Brown heard no more. In his own words, which bring home aptly the horror and confusion of his mind at the moment, 'his hat stood on end, and his hair fell off.' He rushed madly from the spot, and never stopped night or day until he reached the palace, and tendered his resignation. The chief ultimately recovered, and was so disgusted at Brown's precipitation that he eschewed missionaries ever after, married twenty-eight wives, and remains to this day an ornament and defence to his fatherland."

"What a painful story!" observes my companion, who has listened with rapt attention. "I don't think I should

ever have courage to tell that to his lordship."

"Better not; might unsettle him; he has other things to think of."

At this moment the end comes, and with one of the sweetest bows ever vouchsafed to mortal, Mrs. Treadwell sweeps away, saying, "If you are ever in our direction, Mr. Lessenden, you must look in upon us. We return in December, and any day about luncheon time——"

"Thanks; so kind; delighted I'm sure."

Oh, Brown! my friend, these are your stories, not mine; to you the fame. Would that the hospitable invitation to the Episcopal bungalow were yours too; it is of comparatively little use to me.

Here a certain Professor Baldry,

who was entered on the *menu* for a lecture, rises, whispers a word to Mr. Smijthe, and says, beaming on us through his spectacles, "I should be sorry to disturb you over your wine, gentlemen, but time presses, and should any of you like to attend my discourse on the 'Repulsion of concentric atoms,' you will find me in the library."

The old gentleman who distinguished himself at the same period last night, under the impression that he is listening to a speech, raps the table, and says, "Hear! hear! We are! we are!"

Mr. Smijthe mutters something about "All of us there as soon as you're ready."

The professor bows a trifle stiffly, and goes out. A feint is made to

follow him. Two men move off, slightly reluctant, if I mistake not. A pale, undecided youth goes as far as the door, then comes back hesitatingly, finally turns and disappears. One of the men here re-enters, says he must have dropped his pocket-handkerchief, and another, who had reached as far as the hall, returns, and observes that he had a pair of gloves, and where the deuce they're gone to he can't make out. At this point Mr. Smijthe starts the wine afresh, the two denuded individuals settle naturally into their places, and every one looks extremely happy. There is a pause.

"It was a good day's sport you showed us last Tuesday, Tallyowen," remarks a voice.

"So, so," answers that gentleman, who is M. F. H. "We have had

better, and shall have again. If I could only persuade those blundering old fools, the farmers, on the south side of the river there," etc., etc.

"Well, Tallyowen," breaks in the squeaky voice of the old fellow before mentioned, "I've nothing to say against the sport they see with you. I'm too old to see it myself, but the day was when I saw pretty near as much as the most of 'em. Give me the days when old Job Turner hunted the pack—Lord, have mercy on me!—half a century ago! He was a man, he was. I'd like to hear of the pack doing to-day what they did in those days. Aye!" and he swallows at a gulp a bumper of port to the memory of them; while his loose eye revolves rapidly round the table, until it fixes on the master with a glare of challenge.

Tallyowen, as the person addressed, good-naturedly takes up the gloves. "Well, well! you know, old man, we do our best even in these degenerate days, though we don't always carry a half-dozen of port under our belts," with a wink at some of the party. "As it is, I don't suppose even you remember anything much better than our run from 'Bigglesby Gorse' up to the forest last year, straight as the crow flies, and time by my chronometer——"

"I beg y'r pardon," interrupts the old man, rising excitedly, and bringing down his fist with a bang which sets the wine-glasses dancing—"I beg y'r pardon. I'll tell you a thing worth a dozen of it." His voice is husky, but he begins.

"It was the second year after I came

down here, in 183— by the Lord, and we met one Monday at 'Mitcham Friars.' You won't believe it, we drew the coppice blank; then we went on to Hedgham, and drew that blank too. Never saw such a thing in my life. Old Job Turner couldn't make it out at all. We'd been out three hours when he rides up, and he says, 'D—— your eyes!' says he, quite friendly, 'just see if you can't——' At this second what should we see but a great big red devil, as big as a Newfoundland dog, c—— him! well nigh, sneaking down along t'other side of the hedge. We both hollered together, you may be sure. Well, gentlemen, the hounds were pretty keen, and glad to get a sight of him as we were ourselves; and they just went off together with a yell—a yell I can hear still sometimes

—and we followed as we best knew. I can call to mind the names of all the places we went through now. We began about one, and at four o'clock there we were going still, and we'd crossed two counties. The hounds were all there, two-and-twenty couple, as beautiful a lot of ladies as you ever laid eyes on; but more than half of us had smashed up, and there wasn't much life left in the remainder, I can give you my word. Old Job he was there, and his second horse dropped dead under him as we were crossing the boundary line into the third county. 'Good-bye, Baddely,' he says to me, as I passed him. 'Stick to him, my boy; you'll have him yet.' Well! there weren't more than four or five of us left half an hour after this, and it got quite dark, but we blundered on. I rode

uncommon light in those days. At last there was only the huntsman and myself; luckily, the moon rose, and we went on as best we might, till he dropped, and then it was all up with me, for I couldn't see the hounds any longer, though I heard 'em talking away in the distance. Well, gentlemen, you'll scarcely credit it, but the next day that fox and seven couple o' hounds were seen in two adjacent fields forty miles north of the spot where poor Bill, the huntsman, dropped; and it wasn't till the third day they run round, and turned up again in the nor'-west of the county, but there were only two couple left; and the day after that, Thursday, mind you, gentlemen,"—here he bangs the table afresh, and looks round warily at his gaping listeners—"we found the fox—no mistaking the

fox, big as a Newfoundland dog, you know—stiff and stark in a ditch, not half a mile from the run where we bolted him; and there, not four yards behind, lay the best and gamest old hound that ever was worth a king's ransom—poor old Lady Bird—stiff and stark too, poor girl, with her tongue clenched between her teeth." A thump.

We and the wine-glasses applaud vigorously.

"Well done, well done," says the M. F. H., sipping his claret and laughing.

"Supported by five hundred credible witnesses, too," roars the old gentleman with a whack. "Beat it if you can."

To this challenge there is a dead silence. Will the master take it up?

CHAPTER VII.

SUDDENLY the door opens, a servant hurries in, walks half-way down the table, touches Spavington's shoulder, and says in an audible whisper, "Telegram for you, sir."

Spavington tears it open, glances hastily at it, and thrusts it into his pocket. "Have my horse saddled at once," he says, turning to the servant. "Will you excuse me, Mr. Smijthe, for a few minutes?" and he leaves the room.

One or two conjectures are hazarded.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, in his

stables," says a very young man, with an awe-stricken face.

"Wonderful strain," says another, "keeping so many race horses; think of the wear and tear of mind. I hear he was hard hit at Liverpool the other day. Must be like living on a volcano—don't you think so, Tally-owen?"

That authority thus appealed to, smiles, "I might have thought so if I hadn't seen the same effect produced once before on a different stage."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, it was at a *table d'hôte*, and the occasion was the Chantilly races. You'll see he'll give us just ten minutes to talk the matter over, and will then walk in quietly, looking volumes, with inscrutability stamped on every feature."

"Do you really think so?"

"Bet, if you like."

"Well, he is a good man on a horse all the same," chimes in the youth, looking pained at this levity on the subject of his idol. "Why only the day before yesterday, he told me himself he rode second for the military flat cup at Shadylot, and he would have won but——"

"Do you happen to have to-day's paper anywhere handy, Mr. Smijthe?" says the M. F. H.

"Ah, thanks; let's look now." Two or three sporting characters crane over him.

"Here it is. 'Shadylot course. Autumn meeting. First day. Wednesday, the seventh. Grand military flat race. Gentlemen riders. Captain Spottiswood's "Go-to-bed" winner. Two ran.'"

Something very like a cheer greets this announcement, and the youth who introduced the subject, looks as if he wishes the earth would yawn and swallow him.

Here the door opens a second time. Spavington reappears with mystery written on his brow in capital letters, and resumes his chair. A change of conversation becomes necessary.

"Any news from the East to-day?" says the duke, from his corner, speaking, I believe, for the first time.

"Nothing of any importance, your grace," says Mr. Smijthe, in his slow, meek way. "The Porte seems very much shaken by the Russian diplomats."

The old, old man who told us the story, has collapsed under the exertion, and fallen back in his chair, more than half asleep; but at the word "Porte," he

pricks his ears and looks up with a snort of defiance. "Smijthe, Smijthe," he shouts, "whos'h been shaking sh'port'—'sgracheful—ought to know better, sh'age." He relapses again.

"If no one will take any more wine," says Mr. Smijthe, by way of answer, "I think we will join the ladies."

As we rise, the old man totters to his feet. Unfortunately the bishop happens to be close to him, and becomes the next victim. "Recol'cts y' p'f'ctly well," says our friend; "old 'quaintanch's. What I wants'h to know is," he says, stopping him, and looking up with tremendous gravity, "whoosh b'n shakin' the portsh?"

The bishop is nothing if he is not bland. He gracefully eludes the touch. His chin rises the least bit in the world, and he goes on talking, as if uninter-

rupted, in his peculiarly impressive way:—"He was afterwards translated, and became Primate from Sodor and Man; he——"

"Primed with shoda and bran'y," laughs his antagonist vociferously. Capt'l, ha! ha! Prime, ha! ha!" The bishop flies, leaving the victor on the field.

To my disinterested offers of help to find his room, the latter replies persistently "all rightsh;" and when we reach the drawing-room, assures me that is it. He gets as far as the hearth rug, where he lifts his coat tail, and begins the dangerous experiment of balancing himself upon one leg. His success in this is so great that he is led to attempt it without a leg at all, and sits down among the fire-irons, whence he is rescued by Kynaston and myself,

who, under the pretext of getting him to the billiard-room, take him out and hand him over to his own man, who, I hope, puts him to bed.

"Who is he?" I ask Kynaston when we have got him safely off.

"You may well ask," he replies. "He's one of the Baddely's. Orred Baddely, you know (mother was an Orred). You'd never believe it, but that poor old crippled wreck was, fifty years since, the Crichton of the county. They used to say of him, that he was born a three-bottle man; three glasses now will turn his head."

By this time I have learned who most of the people are; but there are one or two left. There is a youthful knight, a Sir Freebody Peabody, whose rank is puzzling, for if one may judge from his face, he can hardly have achieved it

himself. As I have seen him talking to Miss Vibart, I go to her for information.

"Oh, his pa did something, and died in the effort," is her laconic explanation.

"Ah, ha! Then there's one more I wanted to ask you. Who's that lank-haired man with the crooked nose, and choker like a Christy minstrel?" She colours.

"You're not particularly refined in your language," she says. "That's my uncle."

It is my turn to grow red. "I assure you I didn't intend——" I stammer.

She waives me down with her fan. "I might take offence," she observes, "but I won't; I'll introduce you. You've heard of Threnoddy Q. Chirk, the Presbyter, before this?"

I believe I have for that matter, but

the Presbyterian sticks. "What is a Presbyterian?" Time is not given me for reflection.

"Noddy!" calls the lady, beckoning with her face, "Here! A gentleman's dying to be introduced to you."

He bows, too low, and the first thing that strikes me is the incredible gap between uncle and niece.

"Wall, sir," he drawls, extending the biggest hand I ever saw, "it's a reel pleasure to me to shake your flipper. It's bin' the desire of my life to perambulate Europe; but I didn't expect to find things done in this style jest, you lay. The rank, the beauty, the fashion—— A ladies' man, sir, I conclude." He breaks off, bending down to scrutinize me severely.

I smile a deprecatory smile to the soft impeachment.

"In course," he says; "in course. Getting around, sir—eh? Ah! ah!"

He'll dig me in the ribs before another minute is over. Already he is unpleasantly close, and keeps hitting me with—shall we say—his waistcoat, which, for such a tall, lean man otherwise, exhibits a remarkable protuberance.

"Wall, sir, it's a Brobdingnagian risk. Paul says, and I partly agree with him, 'A good woman is her husband's crown.' No cross, no crown, sir, eh? He was a great man, was Paul—a very great man, sir, in his own day—but, Lord! crotchety—awful crotchety!"

He has backed me into a corner, where I am helpless, his big thumb and forefinger are inserted through two separate button-holes of my coat, and he is literally pounding me with his waistcoat.

"I guess I've made my mark now," he goes on, with a grip at my arm, "t'other side of the pond; and I don't need to tell that to a gentleman with your knowledge of the world."

The conviction comes upon me with considerable force, that he must have a private store of onions and garlic somewhere at hand. I am sure there was nothing of the kind on the dinner-table. Through what noisome ways must the man who really thirsts after knowledge travel! I'll give it up from this moment, I soliloquize, making a powerful effort with the muscles of my nose to stop all approach that way.

"I am happy, sir," I reply, with all the dignity I can assume, "to hear that your affairs are in so prosperous a condition."

"Wall," he says reflectively, "we

certainly have riz wonderful out of the cleansing fires of tribulation." He lays against his nose a long finger which, truth to tell, shows small signs of cleansing fires or waters either. "I admit," he goes on, "we are doing a very fair risin' business, savin' souls, at—what did we calkerlate?—wall, from twenty-five to thirty dollars a head. The Lord's bin very good to us, but He's bin drefful bad, too—at times. But understand me, sir,"—here he lays hold of both lapels of my coat—"half the profits goes to Him now."

We are mercifully interrupted at this crisis, for crisis it is, by the entry of the party from the lecture-room. My interlocutor suggests that they look as if they had been "dumped down a bit," to which I assent, and taking the opportunity of escaping, make for the conser-

vatory, which holds out possibilities of a cigar, and probably a fellow misanthropist. But in this I am disappointed. Already the nooks and corners which lie more retired are filled by wearied sportsmen, who have borne the burden of the day, and the place is like a field of battle after an engagement, or the deck of a P. and O. boat in the Red Sea. Here sit two friends, the head of one rested in brotherly love upon the shoulder of the other, both doing their best to snore each other down. There, a mysterious figure, veiled with his pocket-handkerchief to escape detection, lies stretched at full length upon an ottoman, and save that he kicks over a flower-pot whenever he turns (which he does pretty often) one might imagine him to be a corpse. And in the midst of it all, a young couple, foolish and

trusting beyond any words Johnson supplies for description, are sitting, hand in hand, 'neath the murky shadow of a colossal castor-oil plant, ignorant that a silent and prostrate form in their near vicinity is that of Skipwith, and that they will be worth a pound apiece to him before the end of next week. He is a man to whom an opportunity is irresistible ; and as all of the hunt he saw to-day was the breakfast, it is scarcely to be credited that he is exhausted as he appears.

I get no further. The sounds of music are suddenly audible, and several couples at once go off in the direction whence they come. Mrs. Golightly's eye, piteously wandering over the male bipeds as they pass, catches mine where she sits solitary, hiding a sofa beneath her. That there is no *aide-de-camp* in

waiting is plain, so I go temporarily to fill his place. She languidly clears the three square inches usually conceded to male requirements, and I sit down beside her, rather hoping that this will be enough. Far from it.

Twenty years ago (it was during the Madonna period) Mrs. Golightly was wont to declare that her waltzing days were over. He would be a bold man who would hint as much now. We dance the first dance, and the second, in fact until we can do no more, when she flings herself exhausted into an armchair, and lies back, like a child of twelve, with her arms dangling over the sides. Some practice must have been necessary to fall so gracefully. Then she draws off a glove, and swings her hand in the cool air ; it is a pretty hand, and the big blue veins stand out

upon the whiteness of it as it hangs. I remark as much.

"Yes," she says carelessly, "a sign of blood, you know."

"Possibly," I answer, with some sarcasm; "but one it is not very difficult to show." And I hang my hand down until the veins knot across it.

"True," she replies, laying her own lightly upon mine, "but they're not so blue!"

The moral effect of this defeat on me is tremendous, and I am quite submissive, when she suddenly recollects that she is looking after the interests of two young ladies, and carries me off to be introduced. Miss Aughtybridge, the elder of the two, is in her late prime; well set up, and well dressed she is, to be just, but not handsome, and there is that in her face which tells tales. She

has a thin nose, of Roman tendencies, which, impossible as it may appear, she contrives to turn up in emergencies; and the upper part of her mouth projects beyond the lower, displaying two large front teeth, but, like the single one of the gend'arme of Nauteuil, they are full of *orgueil*, and contribute much to the hauteur of her appearance.

I make the customary request. She scans me much in the way one might a strange animal.

"I can give you a square," she says shortly, tossing her head. "*We* never dance round dances with people we don't know."

I begin to suspect royalty at the "we," but discover that it only means a sister at the back, and finding it difficult to express my gratitude in words, I bow. Shortly afterwards the

quadrille comes off, and she relaxes into a few words.

"One can't expect dancing in the country, I suppose," she says, with a sigh of resignation. "Sure to be nothing but a scramble, or a bear-fight. When we were in town this spring for the season" (I hear afterwards that they took lodgings in Brompton for a fortnight) "the polka was everything, nobody danced anything else. I suppose you don't know it, do you?" with an air of almost kindly patronage.

"I can't say I do. I believe my grandmother did."

She eyes me askance. "Have you been in London?" she inquires.

"My rooms face the Green Park."

"I beg your pardon," she returns, colouring; "I thought you belonged to Puddleshire."

"I have no connection with the county."

"Of course, you see one has to be careful," she says apologetically, letting me feel the pressure of her arm for the first time, and in a semi-confidential whisper, "We are the Aughtybridges of Muddleshire; so different, you know, from Puddleshire. Quite a third rate set down here; mamma always insists upon our being so very cautious, it wouldn't do for us to be mixed up with the people who live about." At this point the tip of her nose rises in the surprising way I have before mentioned.

"I can conceive your mother's wish to keep you as you are, uncontaminated," I reply; "but, talking of her, don't you see a vacant chair in that direction? I do."

Driven into a fit of cynicism, I join a band of *blasé* youths of twenty downwards, grouped about the doorways, and watch, as one of them expresses it, "the antics of the company." Fast and furious grows the fun, after our present fashion. White arms begin to mottle with stains of strawberry, fair brows grow gradually purple, Worth's latest creations become dreams of the past. One lady catches, by some extraordinary process, round the feet of a bystander, and unwinds herself, like a reel of cotton, of some undertuck or other, to the extent of perhaps two and thirty feet—in fact, does not discover it until she has reached the other end of the room, and there is no more to come. Will they play cat's cradle? They might, on an enormous scale, people instead of fingers. No!

they are a little bashful, but their friends lead them together; the gentleman apologizes very heartily, very humbly, and is (I hope) forgiven. Some people may like dishevelment, I do not, and go. Skipwith is in the anteroom turning over the books, and I launch into a tirade on our degeneracy. He laughs.

"What are you laughing at?" I say, nettled.

"Oh, not at you," he returns; "I should never do that. If you want style, here's a hint for you," and he puts a pamphlet into my hand.

The first thing I see is our hostess's name; and I read with some perplexity, "Mrs. Indigo Smijthe, yellow rim, pink centre, 2s. 6*d.*; cuttings from do., only 1s. each." Nor am I much enlightened by the next entry. "Mrs.

General Hoskyns, fine, large, claret-coloured, heavy bloom, 3s. 6d."

"I can't make it out at all," says Skipwith, seriously, over my shoulder; "the fair ladies are not extravagant in their self-estimation. Look at the heading, it is simply 'Nursery;' now I don't know anything about Mrs. General Hoskyns, but she ought to be out of the nursery by this time. Go on."

"Major General Hoskyns, great, spiky, double-crested, purple warrior."

"Whew! May I never meet him alone on a dark night. He must be the deuce and all; yet even he has put himself down at the modest sum of '5s., pot included.' What next?"

"Miss Angelica Hoskyns, blush" (I do, though I scarcely see the reason yet); "very chaste, exquisite and

beautiful; suitable for a dinner-table or drawing-room; just coming into blossom.'"

"Now by all the gods of Olympus, what more can a man want than this? I will hie me in search of Angelica, 'the chaste, the exquisite, the beautiful!' Who would not be a nursery gardener to have the chance of paying such very neat things in compliments?"

"Don't you think one might extend the nomenclature with effect to some of the present company? That hot young lady, for instance, with the red face and parti-coloured arms, who has just passed us at a gallop, 'scarlet runner;' or that elderly spinster in bright colours, who minces round, twined up her partner, 'virginia creeper;' or that creature over there, who I declare is enamelled half an

inch thick, for look ! here is a piece that broke off her ;" and with the toe of his boot he designates a fragment on the floor, which may, or may not be, what he says it is. "See you nothing of the ' plant ' in that ?"

CHAPTER VIII.

OF all subjects Skipwith is strongest on women and children ; with the former it is wonderful what his success has been. He has large expressive eyes, and a knack of looking interesting at the proper times ; but all this veils a certain shrewdness of character ; and while, to look at him, you would imagine that he was searching through life for a sympathetic soul, he is in reality going about "like a raging lion" (of a mild species) "seeking whom he may devour." He thinks he does a good deal of harm ; but it is open to question. He is old enough to cling

still to the half-exploded notion of "society," with its "ins," and "outs," to which he attaches a ludicrous importance. Another twist is his intense belief in himself, as a regenerator of it ; but as he very properly urges, if a man does not believe in himself, who is to believe in him ?

His face, as we stand watching the "lurchers," and other varieties in the ballroom, is a study. All these weekly lessons on the right way of doing everything written in vain ! He writes well too, and with quite a feminine capacity for calling ugly things by pretty names ; the public *ought* to listen.

"Ah !" he groans, "what would our great-grandmothers have said to this ?"

"Yes, indeed," I observe, "if parents would only instil at an early age——"

"My dear sir," he stops me ; "you

are a bachelor, and can therefore scarcely have tried those principles of instillation which you advocate. Children," he continues, oracularly—"children are the mockery of their parents. We will say you are a tinker—no offence—you are blessed with a fine male child; before he is well weaned, you have dreams of ambition for him; his pots and pans shall excel all that the world has yet seen; he is to serve his apprenticeship in your workshop, to become your help and partner, and when old age compels you to retire, his broad shoulders are to take up the business, and carry it on to the end. Alas! for your hopes. At the interesting period before referred to, he sees nothing before him but the somewhat complicated arrangement of his mother's dress; his little hand claws at them; perplexed, he

frequently tests the quality of the work by tearing off long strips of frilling, and by other experiments. They impress themselves on his infantine imagination. Before he can speak, he has pricked himself with a needle, and unrolled innumerable bobbins of thread. His next step after he has learned to walk is, to sew together, with materials stolen from his nurse's work-basket, the table cloth, an old stocking, and the pillow-slip that belongs to his crib. You hear of this last exploit, and a horrible suspicion flashes through your mind. In vain you give him half a dozen miniature pots and pans as play-things, he throws them out of window, into the fire, swallows them, anything to be rid of them, and proceeds to clip his nails with a pair of hedge-shears, which he has found. Before he is five

years old, he has made for himself a pair of breeches out of an old coat of your own, which he looks at with all the admiration of childhood, and takes to bed with him at night. You stand aghast ; the boy is by nature irretrievably a tailor !”

“ The blow falls (half expected though it be) with crushing force. Your hopes are blighted, and for the time you go about inconsolable, nursing your disappointment. One fine morning, however, your wife comes to you, with a slightly heightened colour, and tells you, not without ceremony, that she has a secret for your private ear. You listen, and from that time begin to pick up again. A few months elapse, and the secret is out, after the fashion of secrets. You are again a father. This boy, for luckily it *is* a boy, will do all that was pre-

dicted of your degenerate first-born. That he may not be led away like him, you give him a nurse, whose arrangements in the matter of dress are of the simplest description. He thrives wonderfully, takes to his coral (a pretty piece of pink) like a man. While he is yet mumbling it, he manifests a decided will of his own, and an inclination to fight for it. A little later on he picks up a tin soldier in the gutter, and they become inseparable; where one goes the other goes, and though in time the warrior's head is bitten off, and his red coat sucked away, yet he represents an idea, and as such he is still clung to. The child soon makes the discovery that a match left upon the floor will go off, when trodden on, with a bang. As bangs, for some reason or other, are all in all to him,

the house is presently found to be sown with matches. At last the murder is out, when one day his nurse offends him, and shuts him up in a room by himself. On her return he has heaped a barricade before the door, behind which he is found bristling, the poker in one hand, and a dish-cover in the other, prepared to resist to the death. You, poor man, throw up your hands in despair. The boy is a soldier by instinct, and nothing that you or any one else can do, will ever make him anything else." He pauses.

"Well," I laugh, "you may be right, for you are evidently an observer; but don't you believe in hereditary qualities at all?"

"Certainly I do, but I am convinced that, as a rule, you have to go a long way back for them. So, to revert to

your supposititious case : many centuries ago, when perchance Stonehenge was being reared, an ancestor of yours may have carried fire and sword through the land, and made himself a name as a warrior. He may also, as is sometimes the case even now among warriors, have been a bit of a dandy, and may—I am but suggesting—have excited universal admiration by the exquisite engraving in ‘woad’ that adorned his person ; which I conclude would be the nearest approach to tailoring in those days, and so may have been the originator of the tastes, which have developed themselves two thousand years later in your bewildered family. Nature makes game of us in many ways that we never suspect. You admit that I am right ? ”

“ I admit a few grains of sense in all the chaff. At the same time I think I

should have tried a little gentle coercion with those two sons of mine."

"Pshaw! my dear fellow," he returns warmly, "you might as well repress the growth of a child's limbs, as that of his mind; a hideous distortion would be the result in either case; and as for corporal punishment, I hope to live to see the day when the grown man who lifts his hand against a child shall be branded as a coward. We have abolished flogging in the army and navy, yet we keep it for our convict prisons, where it is seldom resorted to, and our schools, where it is an every-day thing."

"What saith the proverb?" I break in soothingly. "'Spoil the rod, don't spare the child.' Come and have some supper."

"I wonder you don't marry, Skip-with," I say as we go, "entertaining

the ideas that you do. Why not go in for the heiress? The figure is large enough in all conscience; but perhaps you would be above touching a woman's money?"

"I doubt whether I should have much hesitation on that score," he replies, with a return of his usual languor, "considering that every penny must have been originally made by one of my own sex; but there are other excellent reasons,"—and he nods towards a dimly-lit alcove, where Stella Vibart and Kynaston sit, apparently oblivious of the rest of the world.

I am startled. The idea, which is new to me, is not altogether a pleasant one.

Skipwith hums a tune. "You know the story of the Irish mare?" he laughs.

"No, I don't." He is always flying off at a tangent.

"Capital story," he goes on unabashed. "Ha, ha! Only two faults, you know; first was, she was so hard to catch, and the second she wasn't worth a —— when you did catch her!"

I am half inclined to retort sharply, which he sees.

"Pooh! my dear sir," he says, "good story, that's all; not worth fighting about. Go and retail it to the duchess. I see a vacant chair up there by her."

"I don't know her, nor am I likely to."

"Bah!" he returns. "A man of your fascinations might have her in his arms in half an hour, if he only went the right way about it."

"He would have as much as he

could well manage, then," I answer, glancing at her magnificent proportions.

At this point Mrs. Smijthe, who is sitting near her, catches my eye, and with a movement of her fan, beckons me up. I push through the crowd to the T-cross of the table, the end where the *crème de la crème* are collected, eating their supper with the identical zest of ordinary mortals.

If I have not before noticed the duke and his wife, it is for the very simple reason that hitherto they have not noticed me. They are both elderly, and have a curious habit of always going about together, but she is invariably a few yards ahead. People say she has led the way all through. Be this as it may, his career has been a distinguished one; though I need not refer to it more particularly here.

Now, it has been ascertained by experiment, that even dukes and duchesses like to meet and become acquainted with celebrities of a different grade to their own, who owe their position to their talents. But the assimilation is often extremely difficult, as Mrs. Smijthe is beginning to find out. She is like a man who has set some vast engine in motion, with whose construction he is imperfectly acquainted, and who feels that one false movement, the turning of a wrong handle, the neglect of a safety-valve at the exact moment, may be fatal, and result in chaos. Just now she dare scarcely speak above a whisper, which affords me considerable enjoyment.

"You are very subdued," I remark.
"I hope nothing has gone wrong. Don't they seem 'chummy'?"

"Oh, don't tease. Do come and help to keep things straight."

"Did you attend the professor's lecture on the 'Repulsion of concentric atoms'? Might have got a hint there, eh?"

"Now, be merciful. Go and sit down in that chair."

"But it's next to the *duchess*," I answer, looking wistfully in that direction.

"Oh, go!" she says, giving me an imaginary push; and I do as I am told. The duchess is on my left, and a Lady Evelyn somebody on the right. They are talking, and if I were not previously aware of my own existence, I should hardly discover it now. My advent makes not the slightest difference; they go on talking and chatting through me.

"Poor boy!" ejaculates the duchess. "I was so sorry, for I really was very fond of him."

"We all were," sighs the lady on my right. "Did you never hear what became of him?"

"No, we never did for certain, though there was a report that when he left the Guards he exchanged, and entered a line regiment."

Lady Evelyn shudders, and the conversation is changed to pleasanter subjects.

I begin to suspect that I shall be very much dependent on myself for entertainment in my new position; but Fortune, unknown to me, is standing behind my chair, or rather, that of the duchess next to me.

It happens that, perhaps because there are no more of a substantial

build, perhaps for the look of it, a dozen or more flimsy, gilt, drawing-room chairs are arranged round the head of the table. Upon one of these sits her Grace, who is leaning forward, talking across me. There is one warning scrunch, and the chair melts away from under her. She makes an effort to gain her feet. I wheel round on the instant, to try and save her, and she falls into my arms! Skipwith's words are accomplished, and this with the exercise of but very moderate fascination on my part. I hear my chair deliberating under me whether it shall go to pieces or not; it decides on the latter, and the duchess is saved! But the concussion is tremendous; the wine-glasses jump with glee, and it would be hard to say who has least breath to spare after it, she or I.

Naturally the sensation created is on a par with the event, and a hundred hands are stretched out to help in the disentanglement, which by degrees is accomplished ; but not until I find myself growing black in the face. Her Grace does the wisest possible thing under the circumstances, and, as soon as she is able, laughs, and thanks me with an affability for which I should scarcely have given her credit. Mrs. Smijthe has risen, and stands by, pale but collected.

"You may bless me," I whisper ; "I have saved you from annihilation."

"Yes, and made yourself," she replies. "You don't often forget yourself, do you, in the services you render your friends ?"

This is ungrateful. An oaken hall-chair is produced, and the duchess re-

seats herself in her old place, fanning herself vigorously.

"Oh, dear!" she says, as soon as people have subsided again, "I really am very *much* obliged to you, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Lessenden," I supply.

"Mr. Blessington; I hope you didn't find me *very* heavy."

"Not at all, your Grace," I reply readily, being perhaps as near to the telling of a falsehood as I ever was in my life without doing it.

She is tickled; for she laughs again in the most gracious manner. "If you had been introduced to me previously, it would not have been nearly so awkward a position; but with a perfect stranger——"

She stops. As I live, the old woman is blushing, or pretending to.

"Oh!" I say airily, "I dare say your Grace has met some of my belongings. You may perhaps know my mother's cousin, the Duke of ——"

"Oh, oh! indeed. Yes, yes, yes! of course," she replies. "Indeed, I had no idea, Mr. Blessingem. Then your mother was—— Ah, yes! to be sure. Just so. Exactly; quite right. I'm very glad of it, and to make your acquaintance."

I bow.

"Then I suppose you see a great deal of the ——?"

"Indeed, I hardly ever see them at all."

"Oh, dear me!" she says, "that's a very great mistake. They're not at all the sort of people to be dropped."

"I fear I've not been sufficiently careful in the people I have dropped."

"Well, sir!" she simpers, half hiding her vast proportions behind a much-agitated fan, "you have been in a position which many men would have given a great deal to be in. A few years ago, sir—a very few years ago, and even yet——" She stops again abruptly, her head on one side, her eyes cast down.

"I know it too well," I reply, in a hurried whisper, bending near her. "I felt it keenly at the moment." This is no less than the naked truth! "Could your Grace have expected otherwise?"

She is silent.

"The poor duke," she murmurs at last, glancing to where he sits bent over the table, noticing nothing, "he is so old."

"Alas!" I reply, like a distant echo.

Needless to say, Lady Evelyn has

disappeared before the commencement of this conversation. Her eyebrows rose to such an extent when the duchess began, that I believe they lifted her out of her chair; at any rate, she went, feeling probably that, as she had not been placed in the same position with regard to me, conversation was unnecessary.

Her Grace pauses after my last remark, as if weighing it, and then, with a sudden tap of her fan upon the table, "Come," she says—"come, I don't know what I have been thinking of; people are going."

"A moment, Duchess; I cannot so easily put away what has passed. If I might ask for some trifling recollection—you will forgive me—a—a" (the only thing that suggests itself is a lock of hair, and as this bears absurdity on

the face of it, for reasons not necessary to particularize, I must hit on something else.) Ah!—"a photograph."

"Ah! Mr. Guessingem, I am sadly afraid I am out of print, though a few years ago, a *very* few years ago, Mr. —, I ran through a great many editions" (sentimentally). "I really can't tell why, but all that I have had done lately have been such dreadful failures. The last that was taken made me look absolutely hideous!" She raises her voice at the two last words, and goes off into a shrill chuckle of laughter.

I try hard not to join, and a fearful internal struggle is the result. However, I do come up to the top at last with a grave smile.

"What a caricature it must have been!"

"And the odd thing was you could see it was meant for me. People knew it at once," she adds.

"Indeed," I answer, feeling able for no more. "May I offer you my arm?" but the length of my tether is reached.

The Laird of Tyndrum, an elderly Scotchman, who, I presume, is in attendance, rises at a look from her. I receive my dismissal, and they go off together. The duke watches them carefully until they reach the door, drops the nutcrackers, lays his napkin on the table, and then, with a slow step, follows after them. *Le jeu est fait.* Candles are being lighted outside, and as we are beginning to know each other, we are growing noisy accordingly. Leaning over the balustrade of the gallery above the hall, is like looking on to the stage of a huge theatre.

We have every variety, from the mountainous forehead of the professor, from which a single wisp of hair projects like a blasted pine upon a rock to the sloping cranium of Pettigrew, who, I fancy, might turn an honest penny by his skull, if he chose to part with it. The old Greek patriarch towers above all, like a giant; his curled white beard sweeping majestically over his broad breast, his long locks resting upon his shoulders, and forming a dazzling frame to his noble Arab features. I half expect a sudden burst of music, and to see the crowd form, break into a ballet, and dance lightly up to bed.

CHAPTER IX.

BEFORE I turn in, I take counsel of a solitary cigar, and my thoughts revert to Kynaston and Miss Vibart. Knowing the man's nature, the idea of coupling them together at first sight seems so startling, so impossible, that I cannot endure it. He is of that rare sort who are too single-minded, too honourable in themselves, to doubt a woman with whom they may be brought in contact; and in the hands of a clever one he would stand a bad chance.

Miss Vibart's fortune is the sensation of the hour; one is sick of the very name of it; it is *the* great topic. As

one goes out two men pass, gesticulating violently, and one catches, "My dear fellow, it's a fact, neither more nor less, twenty thousand."

Two married ladies are descending the staircase. "Fancy, dear," says one of them, "what diamonds one might have, and without any extravagance, with twenty thousand a year of one's own."

"How ridiculously things are divided in this world," sighs the other, and they pass on.

I heard a housemaid this evening talking down the back stairs with a friend below, repeat the obnoxious phrase fifty times. "Twenty thousand, twenty thousand, twenty thousand, a year, a year, a year!" dinning it into the dull brain of her listener, who, however, proved refractory, when she stopped from exhaustion.

A gruff voice, which I recognized as Mr. Goby's, came up from the depths : " I don't believe yer ; ther' ain't no such sum."

Well, the money will be of small matter to him. I suppose he ought to marry ; one can't choose for one's friends as one would often like to do. And, with a pang, comes across me the recollection of another who fell away, and in five years multiplied himself by nine, that is counting the nursery-maids.

I go to sleep at length, uneasy in mind, having smoked three cigars ; and what is more natural than that I should find myself presently seated at the hospitable board of Brown's villa, in the environs of Trincomalee. He himself is the least bit like the bishop, polite and courteous to a degree ; and we are discussing roast baby.

"Sorry I have nothing better to offer you," he says apologetically ; "fact is, it's difficult to get anything else just now in a small place like this. A leg or an arm, did you say? There's a cold joint on the sideboard if you prefer it. Fill your glass. Now then, if you please, 'The Queen.'"

I toss off my glass, and look at him. He has taken off his turban to drink the toast. It is the bishop.

"Your lordship!" I say, hurling all the emphasis I can into the two words. He sits down and helps himself deliberately to cabbage.

"My young friend," he observes sententiously, smacking his lips, "when you're at Rome, do as Rome does. Sit down. Try one of those young papaws—they are very soft and good, or ought to be."

I may mention incidentally that the "papaw" is merely a succulent vegetable, indigenous to those climes.

"You'll be glad to hear," he goes on, "that my flock has prospered wonderfully since poor Brown left us. We've had any amount of la—I mean kids this season." So chatting easily the dinner goes off, and the wine is placed upon the table.

"Now," says my host, "we've already drunk her Majesty's health, suppose we have a song. Do you happen to have heard Cantorini's last?" I shake my head. "It was composed for the opening of the baby show at North Woolwich, the other day. He excels in those sort of trifles. Whimsical *vers de société*, you know." Here he waves his hand. "Perhaps you'd like to hear it?" I assent. "Pray, can you intone?"

"Sorry to say I can't, my lord, but I can join in a chorus with any man."

"Well, here goes, then," he says. It is called "Ober dere," a mere colloquialism, by-the-by, for "over there," and is set to a simple Gregorian melody. He begins—

"Dere is a land ob bliss—Ober dere.
It am different to this—Ober dere.
For they nuffink do but kiss—Ober dere.
Chorus—For they nuffink, etc.

"Dey 've got a pumpkin pie—Ober dere.
If you eat it golly! Why—Ober dere.
You'll *rise*, and den you'll die—Ober dere.
Chorus.

"I wish I was a geese—Ober dere.
To lib and die in peace—Ober dere.
And accumulate much grease—Ober dere.
Chorus."

He stops. "I should think you might guess the next verse," he says, "without giving me the trouble of singing it."

"Trouble's a pleasure, m' lord," I remark generously; "out with it."

It's *not* the bishop at all; it's Br—dl—gh, just as I expected, and they have got over their little difficulties by making him a peer.

In a girlish treble, full of a wondrous softness, he goes on—

"I looked across de riber—Ober dere.

And then I did diskiber—Ober dere.

She was eating tripe and liber—Ober dere."

All at once he grows grave and even respectful in his demeanour. "Was you aweer, sir," he says, "that it's height o'clock?"

"What's that got to do with it?" cry I, who have by this time thoroughly entered into the spirit of the thing. "Chorus, 'She was eating tripe and er—er——' Hullo!" I sit bolt up in bed. My imperturbable valet con-

fronts me. There may be a quiver on his lip, there may be something corresponding in his eye, if so, it is quenched at once in impenetrable gloom.

"Letter for you, colonel," he says, holding out an envelope with a crest and complicated monogram thereon. I take it from him with a feeling of shamefacedness I cannot conquer. How much did he hear? Never; oh, never, shall even a duchess tempt me to spend so much time at supper; and as for the bishop, I shall never dare to face him again. That I, with all my respect for authority, should have dreamed such a dream! The letter is from Ticehurst, and merely contains an invitation to "a quiet dinner in barracks next week." Two nights running to dream in this fashion. I

must be bewitched, or suffering from a most ungodly liver. I am perfectly feverish. Now I remember the bishop would keep passing the bottle, and this is the result, for which a spin across country is Nature's best cure. Yes, the hounds are handy, I will go.

I recall Mr. Goby, and tell him to order my horse, and proceed to dress; but about twenty minutes later, get a pencil note from Mrs. Smijthe, to whom nothing appears to be unknown, asking if I will escort two ladies to the hunt breakfast at Oldham, and saying that if so, they will be ready in a quarter of an hour. I reply, "Delighted," which imperfectly expresses my feelings, and, wondering who they are, go down to the breakfast-room to wait. Very pretty it looks just now, this dark panelled room with

its cloth of snow, its bright fresh flowers, and silver glistening in the pale primrose sunshine that strikes athwart the table. There is no china like the modern in grace, no silver like the old. I am softened always at the mere memory of those little dumpy cream jugs, although at this particular time I am drawn rather to the substantial attraction of the board. But two breakfasts can hardly be conducive to sport. I refrain, and content myself with coffee and a piece of toast. It is hard, and as time goes on grows harder; the quarter of an hour has run into three, and still no sign of my charges; all the red coats have long ago left. I begin to chafe, and look at my watch. An hour gone. We shall have to ride like the wind. I do not even know so far for whom

I am waiting ; but am suddenly enlightened.

Lord Waverleigh comes in ; he is a ridiculously young man, painfully shy, and does not hunt. Mrs. Smijthe pounces upon him, "I am afraid," with an apologetic glance at me, "that Lady Waverleigh will be very late for the breakfast."

I am not a little taken aback. She, then, is one of the party at least.

"Is she nearly ready?" continues Mrs. Smijthe, anxiously.

Her spouse blushes. He cannot be sure.

"How far has she got?"

He turns redder than ever. He "can't say;" or will not, I suspect; he sits down and tries to escape notice by applying himself to some toast and a boiled egg. With that persistency with

which Fate will occasionally pursue a nervous man, the egg turns out to be a bad one; of which we are speedily informed by more senses than one. General attention is called to the fact, and Waverleigh grows extremely confused.

"Let me send that away," promptly suggests Mrs. Smijthe, who still stands at his elbow.

"Thanks," stammers the victim, "much obliged—no; I—that is—I mean to say, fact is, I rather prefer bad eggs!" (sensation.)

If that is the case, which I take leave to doubt, we, his neighbours, do not; and Mrs. Smijthe, feeling that public opinion runs strong in her favour, signs to a servant, who whisks the obnoxious article out of ken, and receives a look of deep gratitude from his lordship, who

returns to his muffin with great zest, thankful to be left alone.

Still no sign of the two ladies. Certainly women approximate to the angels in this, that they are above any idea of time. I rise, determined to wait no longer; the horses have been walked up and down before the door for an hour and a quarter.

Mrs. Smijthe comes out with me. "They're never very punctual at Oldham," she says.

I am about to reply, when I become aware that there are two ladies in the porch, Miss Vibart, who wears a dark blue habit, that certainly would not be matched in the Row (not that this says too much for it), and another, with some similarity of figure, but on a much larger scale, who stands flicking her whip impatiently upon her skirt.

"It is too bad!" she exclaims, "we've been waiting for him nearly five minutes. I suppose he's loitering about the stables, or in the smoking-room, or——"

"Lady Waverleigh, let me introduce Mr. Lessenden," says Mrs. Smijthe.

Her ladyship favours me with a blank stare, bows slightly with her eyes, and on the spot turns her back to talk to our hostess.

I help Miss Vibart into her saddle, which, from the way she vaults into it, I should imagine is quite unnecessary. Lady Waverleigh still lingers talking, as ladies will at the last moment, and long after it, and I come forward and offer to mount her; she says, turning her back again, that the groom always does it, and beckons to him.

At last we get away; both my companions are very silent. We have a

long uninteresting ride up and down innumerable hills to Oldham. I am ravenously hungry by this time, but my heart misgives me as we enter the lodge-gates; we are a good hour late. No particle of red can I discern among the tree stems, beyond a few precocious holly berries. No sound of voices, no neighing of horses, nor blowing of horns. We canter up the slope, the house and lawn come into full view. A solitary old man with a wheelbarrow is the only sign of life upon it. As we ride up, a personage in an evening suit and pumps, who may be one of the guests of last night, or is more possibly the butler of to-day, trips gingerly down the gravel walk to meet us.

"From Haversham, sir?"

I frown assent.

"They've bin gone this half-hour;

I was to tell you, sir, they're drawing the covers at 'Cold Comfort,' up the hills yonder; and if they don't find there, they'll go on to 'Hall's Folly.' " (Ah! what is "Hall's Folly" by the side of mine?)

"Well?"

"And I was further to observe, sir, that if they was any way near about, there'd be luncheon for *the ladies* at two o'clock?"

I nod. I do not care about talking just at this minute. The two ladies both smile good-naturedly. Lady Waverleigh flicks a fly from her horse's ear, and says to nobody in particular—"It's an awful nuisance! but I expected as much; I hate waiting!"

I answer grimly, "So do I."

As for the breakfast, they do not seem to give it a thought; and if they

can bear it, I suppose I ought to be able.

"I think, Stella, we had better hurry on," says her ladyship to Miss Vibart. "Do you know the way?" she adds, suddenly turning. It is the first time she has spoken directly to me.

"No, I do not, Lady Waverleigh," I reply somewhat doggedly.

"Then I'll show you," she says, pricking up her horse with a light laugh; and they bound forward at a hand gallop.

"Yoicks! Tallyho! Gone away! Gone away!" Not at all, nothing of the kind. Try it yourself, my reader, on an empty stomach, and above all, look warily at the gentry who are the deuce at following the hounds in black and white. They will seldom be in the same chapter with them in the field. About mid-day we accidentally

come upon the hunt, and push forward to join them only to find the sedgy banks of the river Puddle flowing between us and them. This necessitates our going four miles up to a ferry. The boat can only take one horse at a time, so it is almost needless to relate that when we reach the spot, they are gone as if they had never been. By the merest luck we run into them shortly after, having done the last ten miles in dead silence; and I disengage myself as soon as I get the chance.

The field are gathered round an obstinate earth from which protrude a pair of jack boots and spurs, apparently in a fit of convulsions.

The small crowd round watch the boots in a silence of the greatest gravity; nearly every-one flask and

sandwich-case in hand. I am just in time, and look round for a friendly face. Kynaston's is the first.

"Hallo!" he says, "Where've you sprung from? You weren't at the meet, were you? How on earth did you get here? Have a sandwich and some brandy?"

"Thanks, thanks."

"Eh, done? Have another?"

"Well, I don't mind if I do. Will tell you how it happened. I——"

"What, more?" for he catches my eye wistfully scanning the box; "fraid they're all gone—yes. Well, did you bring——? Hullo! where are you going?"

But I am off with a wave of gratitude, for I see Harry Ticehurst at his luncheon; and there is no time to be lost.

"How are you, Harry?"

"Why, where the deuce do you——?"

"Oh, from the skies. You don't happen to have a sandwich about you, do you?"

"Yes, I do, old man; but they've gone over to the majority by this time. I've some biscuits, though, at your service," and he pulls out a bag which he hands to me.

The biscuits are welcome as flowers in May, but do not last long enough to enable me to form any decided opinion of their merits.

"If you'd prefer a sandwich" (it is no longer a case of preference—the biscuits are gone), "I can easily get one. Spavington always carries a butcher's shop with him."

My joy is too extreme to be dissembled. "Well, I don't mind if I do," I stammer.

"Hi! Spavington, here, hi!" he shouts.

That gentleman, whose clothes fit him like a second skin, and whose legs are of a slimness altogether preternatural, walks slowly up as if he did not much relish being shouted at.

"Here, Spavington, you know my friend Lessenden, I think; where's that meat-safe of yours? We're" (how thankful I am for that "we") "starving."

Our friend looks quietly annoyed, but says nothing, and, as if under moral pressure, unstraps a leather sandwich-case from his saddle, which certainly is not undersized—however, this I will not quarrel about—and hands it languidly to me.

"Chicken and ham," he says; "will you try one?"

"Well, I don't mind if——."

"Oh, come, Lessenden! Leave him the box, Spavy, and he'll mind still less."

I feel called upon to explain at this point that I have had no breakfast, in fact, nothing to speak of since yesterday evening. They look at me with an air of curious pity, mixed with unbelief, and the horsey gentleman evidently takes it as a hint, for he rides sadly away, leaving his case in my possession.

"You know Spavington of ours?" says Ticehurst, jerking his thumb in the direction he has gone. "Celebrated fellow—great racing man—name mentioned in the papers—same column as the Duke of Blackleg's—only last week he——"

Here Skipwith canters up. I have often wondered whether, ten years ago, Skipwith knew a horse from a cow. If not, at any rate he has trained himself

into that knowledge since, as he has into many other kinds in the progressive course of his necessities, and now looks fairly happy in the saddle—at least, at luncheon time. The yearning for sympathy in the human heart is great ; I cannot refrain from unbosoming myself of my trouble.

" *They* didn't mind it in the least, I assure you, and the only conclusion I could come to was, that Lady Waverleigh is made of cast-iron, and that, owing to the peculiar conformation of the fair American's habit, there is small necessity for sustenance."

Skipwith smiles his own superior smile. "I don't wish to dispute your theories philosophically, but as I came downstairs this morning, I met her maid just carrying a tray out of her room. On the tray were the empty shells of three

eggs, and the bones of two mutton chops, a half-opened box of sardines, and a glass jar of amber-tinted marmalade——"

"Stop!" I cry; "stop! spare me! I will hear no more."

Ticehurst yells with laughter, and I am bound to join him, though I have paid for the joke.

"I wonder whether Lady Waverleigh did the same?" I rejoin, when we have recovered a little. "She really is a splendid woman. What a dragoon she'd make—eh? Look at her shoulders; see the way she sits her horse. The worst of it is that, although I admire her prodigiously, she hasn't a word to throw at a dog, much less at me. I have tried every subject, and failed."

"H'm!" puts in Skipwith. "Let's see, she was three years governess in a

harem at Constantinople, I believe. Try her on Turks, and bonds, matrimonial or otherwise."

"I will. Thanks for the hint."

"She and her husband are an oddly assorted pair."

"Rather. Poor Waverleigh was let in. He was a third son, you know; nobody paid much attention to him, and he was allowed to wander about, when he was quite unfit to take care of himself. He got down as far as Turkey, where she nipped him literally in the bud, and has taken care of him ever since, poor fellow! His two elder brothers were drowned together yachting in the Hebrides, and he is now forced into a position which suits him ill enough, and which he neither expected nor wanted. I will not say the same for her."

CHAPTER X.

At this moment one of the boots begins to emerge slowly, and a confused sound from beyond tells that the very deuce is going on in the bowels of the earth. The boot is shortly followed by a leg, crooked with volumes of indescribable meaning, and the excitement becomes painful.

"Now, ladies! now, gentlemen! stand back, if you please." So much the old huntsman who mounts guard over the leg. "Git them beggars back."

The horn tootles, but it is difficult to keep the hounds off. One creeps to the edge, and scratches behind the

hunter's back; while another, not daring to do so much, stands by, whining and shivering with wistful eyes.

The man turns sharply. "You won't get back, Marplot, won't you? Then take that"—whack, whack—"and that"—whack, whack. "You ought to be ashamed o' yourself, leadin' that ere young 'un wrong."

The "young 'un" scuttles off, with a yelp, and "Marplot" sits down, just out of range of the lash, throws up her nose, and howls dismally. The hunter glares round as if he would not object to send the lash in among us, who are nearly as disobedient as the hounds.

By degrees the whole thing wriggles out—a body, in a yellow striped waistcoat, much tumbled, then a fat, purple face, two arms, two little terriers, once

white, and a yellowish fuzzy ball, be-draggled with mud and crimsoned earth, out of which glittle two bright beady eyes; all these joined on together, so that it is impossible to tell where one beast begins and the other ends—a spectacle to excite compassion, but the clamour that rises has little pity in it.

"Look after that terrier, will you?" sings some one, throwing a little shivering wretch into my arms. I jump with it into the saddle. No time to be lost. Thirty seconds start, and already the hounds are streaming down the hill in full cry, whilst up the other side of the valley, over a bare stubble field, sneaks a little dusky object away at a great pace. The group has divided in the wonderful way a group does on such occasions. One or two have gone exactly in the opposite direction to the

fox, and will be there when they are wanted, no doubt. A few follow the line, the rest scatter. My terrier, madly excited, breaks the chain of my watch, and proceeds to rip up the saddle with his claws; seeing which, I renounce my trust and, holding him by one ear, drop him gently into the first soft ditch. He gives a yelp of intense satisfaction, and, with his nose to the ground, and tail stiff at a right angle, forthwith begins to hunt on his own account.

We settle down to steady work, and my late companions keep excellent places. Lady Waverleigh looks neither to the right nor the left, but takes her fences as they come, crashing through when she cannot surmount them. Miss Vibart, on the contrary, skims over everything like a bird. We have been

running ten minutes, perhaps, when we come upon a brook with high broken banks. The rains have swelled it until it has become an ugly place. The hounds are in and over. Our leader reins up on the edge, too late ; the bank gives with the horse's fore feet, and quite gently he and his steed descend head foremost into the stream. We all pull up in disgust.

With a little difficulty the submerged gentleman flounders out, bridle in hand. Some look up stream, some down, when the thunder of hoofs upon the slope at our back is heard. The crowd parts into a road by instinct. "Good heavens ! it's Miss Vibart. She's never—— She'll be killed !" The mud and stones fly, as if a shell had burst among us. There is a cry, which changes into a ringing cheer

when she rises straight and square into the air, as if shot from a gun, and lands with a crash upon the opposite bank. The sludgy marge gives way as before, breaks under the horse's hind legs, a few clods of earth tumble into the water; it is touch and go; for a moment he staggers backwards; then, with a gallant effort, rights himself, and she is safe. His rider turns half round, bows slightly in acknowledgment of our cheer, waves her whip with a gesture of adieu, and is out of sight over the brow of the hill in a few seconds, leaving the whole field pounded.

We all laugh; it is so ridiculous (on our part).

"Never seed that brook done in flood time afore," says a hard-riding farmer, agape. "She can't hold 'un,

so she lets 'un go; that's her secret," says another.

"Any one could go if they only rode seven stone on that big black brute of hers," growls Pettigrew. "Why, when I was at Rumgumgee, I——"

We move off rapidly. He also turns his horse.

"When I——" he repeats, looking round.

A howl interrupts him. He is on the top of a lagging hound. He backs off with an oath. A stout, high-coloured man rides up to him.

"Don't you think, sir," he says, with studied politeness, "that it would be of advantage to the hunt, and to society in general, if you were in H—— and settled?" The last word with tremendous emphasis. "Now, gentlemen," he continues, "we had better get on,

unless you wish the lady to do all the work for you. I see they have found a ford up higher;" and away he goes, while our friend slinks off, muttering like an unspent thunder-storm.

When, a few minutes later, we come up with Miss Vibart, the fox has been run into and devoured. She herself sits calmly flicking the hips from a hedge-row, surrounded by the pack, who are lying down, licking their chops, and growling over the remnants of the feast. The flecking and foam have dried on the glossy coat of her great black horse. Save for a slight heaving of his flanks, he shows no signs of his late exploit. The master comes up, and, taking off his hat, introduces himself, as he explains that it is quite impossible for him to hold his tongue under the circumstances. Lady Waver-

leigh and two or three others follow, among them Kynaston, whose face tells its own tale. He is white as a sheet, but he is silent, and bites his lip. As he rides up, the girl glances shyly at him, and continues talking to the others. I may do her injustice—I hope I do—but this simplicity does not fit with the reckless dare devilry of the brook.

I here strike up acquaintance with a small boy bestriding a grey pony, whose cleverness I have noticed during the run. Some opposing thicket has traced on his face a complicated arabesque; for all that, he is a gentlemanly looking lad. I tender him my flask by way of an advance.

"No, thank you; never take anything when I'm out; find it doesn't pay," he replies. "Did you see that

girl? Isn't she a stunner? Wouldn't I like to marry her! Wouldn't you?"

"Ha, ha! the thing never struck me in that light quite before. What are you going to do then? Will you propose as you ride home?"

"No," he says thoughtfully; then, with more decision, "But I would if I could. I haven't been introduced to her; and, besides, I've got to go back on Monday."

"Ah! well, you must put it off till next holidays."

He shakes his head. "Shan't have the chance. Some fellow's sure to marry a girl like *that*!"

As the subject is broaching on delicate ground, I change it to the pony. "That's a capital pony you've got there."

"So so," reining him up, to show

him off; "but he's getting past his work. Egad! you should have seen him the first season I hunted him—a three-year-old, you know."

"You must have hunted yourself then as a three-year-old."

He ignores this innuendo, and goes on. "Oh! he's very well," eyeing him critically, with his head on one side, and tapping his teeth with his crop. "As he's carried me so long, of course I don't like to part with him now. Poor old Punch!" and, forgetting his stilts, he flings his arms round the pony's neck, and gives him a hug.

The animal jerks his head up, and whisks his long tail. They quite understand each other.

"I say, if you're ever up our way at Oldham, they'd be awfully glad to see you." He looks at me, half

frightened by the boldness of his proposition.

"Would they?" I laugh. "How do you know that?"

"Of course they would," he rejoins, drawing himself up, "if you came as *my* friend."

We are moving towards a neighbouring dingle, and find almost at once. The hounds go straight away over a broad flat piece of plough, a low hedge crosses in front. Oddly enough, nearly the whole field make off obliquely. As I see no reason why I should not follow direct, I try for the hedge. I have no pace on to speak of, and am luckily able to pull up; for beyond the little fence, and running alongside it, is a huge dyke, half full of water, as blind and dangerous a trap as ever seen in the field. I waive back two or three who are coming up.

"Stop!" I yell, "stop!" as a man on a powerful chestnut, jaggling his bit in the air, and with blood streaming from his flanks, plunges heavily by with a great raking stride. I point frantically to the dyke, which, unfortunately, the hedge hides.

A jeer is my only answer. It is Pettigrew. Cruelly he is punishing his horse. I see the poor animal, positively *sober*, as he comes upon the brink, and catches sight of the place. He cocks his ears, shakes his head, and gives a tremendous spring. His forefeet never even touch the bank opposite; he and his rider fall straight down through the air, with a loud cry. There is a plunge, and all is still. I gallop to the edge, and am intensely relieved to see Pettigrew crawl out unassisted on the opposite side; but the

wretched horse lies motionless below, with his back broken. However, as he observes, a horse more or less is nothing to him, I go, feeling that there must be an excellent reason for his not having been drowned.

This delays us a bit, but the hounds are close by in a wooded dell, where they have lost their fox. A slight whimper now and then comes up through the still air. I hurry towards them; the whimper grows. This time I am in luck. Hardly have I reached the river-side, when a great yellow dog-fox bolts almost under our legs. He takes a beautiful line over a wide extent of sandy grass land, closely intersected with hurdles. We all get off together; and, as the fences are small and the incline slightly downhill, the pace becomes, after a few minutes, pro-

digious. Our numbers thin slightly, and we go on for a long time like clock-work, rising at each hurdle as it comes, at the precise distance of its predecessors. My horse is certainly a good one; but he begins to show signs of distress. A gentleman on my right, without the slightest provocation, goes off in a catherine wheel, performing at a rough guess some fifty revolutions per second; while his spurs and glass, as they catch the level rays of the sun, add greatly to the pyrotechnical effect. Skipwith is beginning to show unnecessary daylight between himself and his saddle, and nearly parts company with his horse.

"Stick to him, Skipwith—stick to him; it ought to be easy, for he's good blood," shouts a malicious friend. A youth whose one idea it is to ride

a hired screw at impossible fences, until both he and his steed are *hors de combat*, succeeds in placing himself in that desirable position at last.

Still we are gaining. About three squares ahead, for the ground is laid out like a chess-board, is the fox; in the one next to him are the hounds—might be covered with a table cloth—and here are we, almost all together in the third. He may calculate his time with mathematical precision. The ground begins to rise, and beyond the next hurdle is a stone wall. The boy from Oldham creeps up alongside me. He says nothing, but looks straight to his front, terribly in earnest. He is riding beautifully. So! now we have only the wall to tackle, for they must run into him on the bare upland

beyond. The wall comes. It is an ugly erection of loose stones. My horse pulls himself together, surmounts it with difficulty, and drags his hocks painfully over the top, whence a few big pieces come clattering down. I turn with some anxiety to look at my boy. He has got on all the way possible ; but, as he reaches the spot, the pony stops dead, though the force of his impetus flings him breast on to the wall. The boy flies well clear of it, head-over-heels into the air, and alights, as if he were a trained acrobat, and had done the thing five hundred times before, *on his feet*. He never even looks at the pony ; but, with a cheer, darts forward, swinging his crop over his head, rushes with all his might up the slope, and is on the spot when the moment after the hounds run into their

fox, and sounds his death warrant with the best of them, "Who-op!"

The master presents the brush to Miss Vibart, who was among the foremost. She takes it, and rides up to where the boy stands, still panting with his struggle up the hill. "If I may," she says, "I'll pass it on to where it is best deserved. I couldn't keep it with a clear conscience when this little fellow is here." She bends over, and with the air of an empress bestowing the cross of valour upon a veteran, gives it to the boy. He flushes crimson; it is the proudest moment of his life; but he is still far too breathless to speak, and has to show his gratitude by a series of the most desperate faces.

"Does 'old Kentuck' run to this?"
I ask myself, with some astonishment.

The story of the wall is told all round, for several saw it; and its hero has no reason to complain of the glory that falls to his share. The recalcitrant "Punch" is brought up amid cheers and laughter, looking not the least ashamed of himself, but rather the contrary. His master remounts him, and, glad apparently to escape, trots off in the direction of home.

CHAPTER XI.

AFAR off I discern Lady Waverleigh, sitting her horse hand on hip, and staring placidly in front of her.

"I've been looking at you for some time," she says, as I ride up, "and I've come to the conclusion that that off fore leg of yours is just a trifle groggy."

"You may be right, but, with all due deference, the leg is not mine, but Mrs. Smijthe's, for the horse is hers."

Her ladyship chuckles. "We shall do very well in time."

"We ought to be going home. Where's Miss Vibart?"

"Oh," she replies, shrugging her shoulders, "she'll come fast enough; let's get on."

The field is moving off, and we turn into a wood of tall pines, whose branches meet and interlace overhead, until they form a solid vaulting. The fresh smell of the damp earth and down-trodden leaves of the fern, which alone grows under the pines, rises odorous to one's nostrils. The sun is sinking fast before us into a leaden mist that lies banked up against the horizon; it touches the rough stems which stretch above and around with a glint of flame colour, and pours on the little knot of red-coated horsemen as they trot under the trees. The tired hounds follow close, and the low note of the horn wakes up at intervals the sleeping echoes of the wood.

Lady Waverleigh, I believe, would as soon ride between two brick walls.

"Bore this sun is in one's eyes."

"I can bear it in such a scene as this."

"You're fond of scenery, I suppose?" she says, with a contemptuous inflection in her voice, and a look to see what manner of man I am, who confess to such littleness.

"Certainly," I acquiesce, rather nettled at her manner. "You, I conclude, are not?"

"On the contrary"—with an air *moqueuse*—"I am particularly fond of some kinds of scenery—coats and hats, for instance. Doubtless," she continues, with her nose tilted, "you are one of those men who go about the world with a block of drawing-paper in your pocket, and make little sketches of anything that

takes your fancy. These you show to your sisters when you go home, and are rewarded by their admiration. Of course, you paint flowers on china, and sketch from nature under a white umbrella. I can imagine your rooms: a few well-chosen water-colours adorn——"

"Lady Waverleigh," I interrupt, struggling to keep my temper, "you are extremely witty at my expense. You know nothing of me, and when I heard this morning that I was to have the pleasure of your company——"

"The pleasure, of course, I can't answer for. As for my company, you didn't get much of that; and we should not be together now but for the way in which you have behaved to-day. I took a dislike to you at first sight, but——"

This is intolerable! "Pardon me,

Lady Waverleigh," I object, lifting my hat, and reining up preparatory to turning—"pardon me, if I have not been so fortunate as yourself in finding a reason for the improvement of our acquaintance. I will wish you good evening."

I move away. There is a sort of hesitation in her manner for a moment, which vanishes.

"Stop!" she cries imperiously, advancing and laying a firm grasp upon my arm. "Stop, sir—I forget your name, but—don't be a fool!"

I shake her hand off. "Lady Waverleigh, you presume too much!"

We have advanced far into the dusky pine wood; the stems have closed round us, until the light of the evening has faded almost entirely away. Yet by what little there is, I see an eagerness

in her face which half inclines me to relent. She interrupts me.

"You have some object, some *rôle* in life ; every man has, or ought to have. I can help you, and, if you will let me, I will." These last words in a certain gentleness of tone that I could not have imagined in her voice. "You, perhaps, know my position," she goes on hurriedly. "Patience—my influence, at any rate, will be great. Perhaps, sir, you would think yourself degraded by being indebted for help to a woman ; but let me tell you that she who offers it has little of the woman in her." She draws herself up in her saddle, and faces me with gesticulation that bespeaks her foreign education. "Yes," she continues, "she has lived among men, commanded men, and would have died among them—once, at any rate.

See what they have done to my sword arm." She laughs, and pulling off her gauntlet, bares a white and powerful wrist, just above which stands out the red seam of a cruel gash. "And here," she says, placing her left hand on her hip, "I shall carry a bullet to my grave. Why should you refuse the right hand of a comrade? It is fate. I disliked you; your tact has conquered the dislike. For eight and forty hours have I tried to keep you at a distance, and here we are thrown together alone, through no seeking certainly of yours or mine. I have given you my confidence, and so a power over me; do not abuse it by turning from me now. I would do anything for you." She lays her hand in mine. Mechanically I take it, and look into her face. How tremendous is the force of expression!

it is absolutely beautiful. And under the strange influence of her eyes, my brain seems to swim and my reason to desert me. She perceives her advantage and presses it. "Promise me at least your friendship," she urges.

We have reached an open glade, where the light shows how much she is in earnest. Too confounded by what I have heard to speak, I have gone through a dozen different emotions in as many minutes; and it would be hard to say what is the one uppermost just now. I can hardly doubt her, yet a certain distrust lurks in my mind. I am no believer in women who find their sex a burden; nevertheless, I yield this much, that I promise what she asks; and disengaging her hand we ride in silence out of the wood. The moon has risen, and it is full an hour

before we come up to the rest of the Haversham party.

With a feeling of dismay, I afterwards reconsider the scene and recognize the influence which, in spite of myself, this woman has established over me. But our intercourse during the next few days is of the most ordinary description; she never refers in any way to what has passed, and I, for my part, try to forget it.

One morning Kynaston asks me to drive round with him, and call on the Aughtybridges. He, for some reason or other, has to go, and as I scarcely like to desert him in his trouble, I assent, partly hoping that I may induce him to talk about himself and his affairs. In this I am disappointed. I mention Miss Vibart's name casually, he does not respond, and his manner suffi-

ciently warns me off. So we choose other topics, and in time find ourselves at the entrance of "Muddlebury Park." A pair of cast-iron gates in which the graceful fancy of the builder has had full scope, and a dirty crested lodge in stucco, with Corinthian columns and pointed windows confront us. Beyond is a pitiless square house, not much larger than the lodge, faced with clean plaster in the front, and set off with bright green shutters; the sides and back revelling in the undisguised beauty of yellow brick. On the grass plat, are several plaster statues, among which heads and limbs appear to have been unequally distributed, as some are without them altogether; and in a field below, three miserable deer are penned up.

It is an immense time before the bell is answered, and the minion who at last

does it, has a very red face, shock hair, and his waistcoat buttoned awry, all the way down. Meanwhile, I am aware that there can be few people in the house in a state of ignorance as to our personal appearance. I only glanced, but my impression is that they are fighting for places in the upper windows.

The inside of the house is worthy of the out. The drawing-room is evidently seldom used; most of the furniture is covered up, and that which is not, displays a surprisingly florid magnificence. Upon the chimney-piece is a monstrous clock in coarse ormolu, with candlesticks to match; and in the grate, a poisonous green horsetail, adorned with gold leaves in stamped paper of the "chastest" description. When at length the inhabitants do ap-

pear, we are received with enthusiasm. The family drop in by degrees, and sit round in a circle. Mrs. Aughty-bridge makes many apologies, and orders a fire to be lighted. So the decorative horsetail is whipped off, strewing the floor as it goes. Conversation languishes. The daughters talk of their dresses, not forgetting the tradesmen who supplied them, which they apparently think gives them a social *cachet*; an idea which seems pretty common just now among a certain class.

Kynaston makes violent if rather spasmodic attempts to keep things going, but is pitifully swamped by the seven grown up young ladies, who are all down on him at once.

"Isn't it a trifle lonely, here?" I adventure.

"Oh no; we have the Ditchwaters, you know," answers the eldest girl, tossing her head.

Now, Ditchwater must be at least six miles off, so the duchess can hardly be running in and out all day as this might imply. We touch on the gay world; considering where they live and who they are, their minute knowledge of its doings is remarkable. Is it possible that the litter of "Society papers" on the table has anything to do with it, or has a shilling entrance to a Knightsbridge bazaar, enabled them to speak of all the celebrities as personal friends? Kynaston happens to mention the dance the other night, and the whole eight ladies find their tongues at once.

"Oh yes; they heard all about it, and some of them went." "Was it

true that——?" "Did he see how Mrs. A. was going on with young B.?" and they supposed there could now be no doubt as to Miss Woodcock's little game.

Kynaston rises, so abruptly that he is almost rude; and although the housemaid, who has had to dress, is but just poking the wood into the grate, in spite of all protestations, we shake hands and escape.

"What a nasty thing a county family is, isn't it," he says, "now and then?" and he drives off at a furious pace.

"Let us go round by the barracks, and take the taste out of our mouths," I propose. "I want to leave a note there." And so it is arranged.

When we reach Highbury, however, the first person we meet is Ticehurst, who insists on our going in. Cooly, he

says, is at home and he takes us to his quarters.

Mr. Cooly was apparently not expecting visitors. We find him lying well back in his armchair, one leg over a low table in front of him, and the other, incredible to relate, *behind his head*, so that the slipper of his right foot dangles gracefully over his left shoulder, and his head rests lightly on his shin, as another man's might on his forearm; he is smoking at his ease. We are so taken aback by this astonishing spectacle, that we halt simultaneously. The object of our interest deftly "undoes" himself, and rises with a muttered apology.

"Delighted 'see you, m' sure. Gout, my dear sirs, gout—wonderful relief! Just like my infernal luck; skips a generation, you know, and I hit on the

wrong one. Of course I don't mind the old governor so much, but when I think of my son, the young scoundrel," he shakes his fist menacingly in the air. "I believe I shall strangle him at his birth. Have some fizz?" and without waiting for an answer, he fills a couple of tumblers from a bottle on the table.

Even Mr. Cooly is subject to external influences; his gravity is greater, his tone more injured, and his eye-glass is more deeply screwed into his face, it has no string, but stands alone defiantly; still he is not the man he is on his club steps.

Round three sides of the room is a hecatomb of boots of all sizes, shapes, and descriptions. I compliment him on his collection.

"Well"—in a voice from which all joy has been cast out for ever—"it is

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pretty fair ; it's all I've got to take an interest in now," and he sighs under the memory of some grievous wrong.

"Why, Cooly," says Ticehurst, looking round the room where, indeed, there is a great deal of dilapidated furniture—an iron garden-table smashed in the stem, and some chairs of equally formidable material, broken to pieces—"what *have* you been doing with your furniture?"

"Row with colonel," says Mr. Cooly, shortly and sulkily.

"Oh, come, he didn't do all that!"

"No—not all," unwillingly concedes our friend.

"Or any of it?"

"Well, I call it very hard," mutters Mr. Cooly ; "just after I'd refurnished in cast-iron, hoping that I'd got something that would wear at last. Then he comes, and bullies, and badgers me,

in my own room, mind, till he just drives me wild; he'll stay two hours sometimes, and you can't wonder when he does go, if a fellow's blood warms a trifle, and he does knock the chairs and tables about. Bah!" he says, with a look of fierce contempt at the *débris*, "they're brittle as glass. I wish I'd been born fifty years earlier," he goes on moodily, "I'd have escaped the gout, and I might have been his colonel." His glass sparkles for an instant, and then sinks quenched in its primeval gloom.

At this point, two dirty white terriers, each mulcted of a leg, and hobbling along, one leaning up against the other for support, come into the room. Never probably did living dogs beat more scars than these; they are covered with them. The tail of one is gone

altogether, that of the other is broken in two places; what little of their ears is left hangs in strips, and they have only three eyes between them. Cæsar had forty wounds on his breast, and none on his back, but what was he to these dogs, who are perfectly hidden by them. The two veterans seat themselves, not without dignity. (Who ever knew a mongrel that was not half a gentleman at heart?) "Those are dogs if you like," says their master; "ain't much left of 'em now though. I gave 'em wooden legs and artificial eyes some time ago but they didn't know how to use 'em."

Mr. Cooly here, with a word of apology, proceeds to shave; and it may be taken as a fair proof that his troubles so far have not affected his nerves, that he sets one of the veterans

on sentry by the side of his looking-glass as he does so, while the other begins a light and digestible luncheon off the claw of a stuffed eagle, which has dropped on to the floor, and from which an appetizing piece of rusty iron protrudes. The sentry's single eye is inflamed, but wakeful; he has a slight hiccup, and sways to and fro as he sits; all goes well for some time, when he suddenly espies a strange cur in the yard. With a bound he is off, scattering candles, scent-bottles, and rings in wild confusion. The other joins, and uttering a yell worthy of the palmiest of heroic days, they cast themselves upon the foe, and we see them rolling over and over across the square, in clouds of dust, gathering fresh laurels to their crown.

Meanwhile Mr. Cooly has let a con-

siderable quantity of blood, which, he declares, has done him almost as much good as if it were the colonel's, and we take our leave.

"It's an old feud between the colonel and him," laughs Ticehurst in explanation; "they're both slightly eccentric. Well then you'll dine with me on Tuesday, both of you. Good-bye."

It turns out a wet afternoon. The palace smoking-room is crowded. It may appear presumptuous in a male pen to attempt to describe such a scene, but a word must be said.

Here in whispered Archaic converse, the golden youth of sporting proclivities discuss the mysteries of the turf. They usually sit in a ring, and what little of their speech reaches the outer world is of a technical and fragmentary character. "Mark my word,

Bolter's a *good* horse," whispers one. The recipient of this information makes no reply, but sits, as it were, digesting it for a period, when he presently taps his neighbour on the other side, who happens to be Peabody. "S't! Flutterby says Bolter's a good horse." "Does he?" returns Peabody, flashing into a momentary brightness. "A—h!" (impressively) "so's Pongo." The gentleman in the middle again takes time and stares steadily at the fire for ten minutes, when at length removing his cigar from his lips, he turns to his original informant. "Peabody says, 'So's Pongo.'" This is too much to be realized all at once, but by slow degrees Pongo makes friends, and is presently spoken of as a favourite.

Here comes the professional jester, who makes this his happy hunting-

ground. He has just returned from Ireland, where, not being a landlord, he has had innumerable adventures of a humorous description, some of them bearing a close resemblance to the experiences of former travellers in those regions ; but his great delight is to burst into the room, "I say, you fellows, have you heard the latest? Got it from town this morning, 'Why is Gladstone a popular man?'—'Because he's such a good feller—trees, you know!' Ha! ha!" With something of this kind he invariably throws off. There is one only occasion on which he ever becomes serious, and that is when some one else tells a good story. Then he gets very grave indeed, and frequently leaves the room. There is a larger gathering than usual to-day, and an animated conversation is in progress.

"I dislike that woman particularly," says a guardsman, in an aggrieved voice. "With circumambient toe she extracted my hassock from under the seat, as she passed me in church last Sunday, and carried it up the pew with her. Besides, she was decked out like——"

"The two ideas of the sex," puts in Skipwith, "to be comfortable and to look pretty."

"Gad! I'd try and look pretty myself," growls old Baddely from his corner, "if I thought I could have the choice of two or three town and country houses, with their etceteras, for so doing, as these young women may; so would you!"

"It's the sickening worldliness of the thing," retorts Skipwith.

"Ah, my friends," breaks in the

Jesuit Provincial, who is a sociable elderly gentleman, and rather affects young men, "worldliness is very bad, but if you only knew the vagaries of unworldliness;" and he sighs heavily. "The want of common sense alone which——"

"Common sense," snarls Dr. Baldry; "I've had much experience, and I know that common sense is about the most uncommon sense in this world." With this dictum he makes his exit. Mr. Baddely and the professor have occasional bickerings, the former declares that the latter is always laying down the law, and that he has not been accustomed to take the law from any man; he further accuses him of making up to the duchess with ulterior views as to advancement; so on this occasion he turns to the Provincial and explains

that he's a conceited ass, and that he talks about "our place among the infinities," while he hasn't the faintest idea of his own among his fellow men.

"It's the old story, I see," laughs the guardsman, changing the subject, "about Kynaston; all the women are in love with him, and I hear the fair heiress, as the chief recipient of his attentions, is universally known as 'that horrid girl.' Well, it's something new for him to be paying attention; he used to get it all, and look very unhappy under it. How the women did persecute him, to be sure. When he was in Paris some ladies from America wrote and said they wanted to 'sculp' him, and he, regarding this as a vague but terrible threat, fled for his life."

"Who was that tall man who came in and went out again?" asks some one.

" Lord Newbiggin. Old Upshot, you know, that was ; firm of Pushby and Upshot."

" I wonder if he's got his arms yet ? " says another languidly. " I read of a capital coat of arms for a gentleman in his position the other day, three mushrooms rampant on a field or, and the motto ' Here we are. ' "

At this point Pettigrew and Daubigny enter. As a rule Lord George will have none of us, but sits apart in aristocratic seclusion, and smokes solitary cigars through a ballet girl's leg of colossal size, to the toe of which he appears to hang. However, he occasionally condescends to discuss art with this distinguished professor, and though Daubigny winces under it, the father is a noble patron, and he thinks it best to submit.

"'Sure you, sir," says Pettigrew, in a loud voice, "saw the pictchar at Madrid; lot of 'postles, and f'llahs—dam 'fernal f'llah's big toe, sir, sticks out like anything; wond'f'l, 'pon m' soul!"

Lord George does not stay long, and when he goes a volley of abuse follows him. A pacific little Irishman, however, steps in to calm the tumult. He says it is a great pity when people build up gaps between each other; that he never quarrelled yet with any man, and sooner than do it with another man's guest when he was staying in the house, he would put a pistol to his breast and blow his brains out. At which horrible picture, the assembly breaks up.

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